

# **CONVERSION AND COMMUNICATION**

**Christian Communication and Indigenous Agents  
of Conversion Among the Kui People of Orissa, India  
1835-1970**

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**A thesis submitted to the University of Edinburgh for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

## Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis constitutes my own research and writing, and it has not been submitted in any previous application for a degree. All quotations have been distinguished and the sources of the information acknowledged.

Jagat Ranjan Santra  
October 2004



## ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the study of large-scale conversions to Christianity among the many tribal and Dalit communities in India needs to be done from a communication perspective. My research attempts this with special reference to the conversions among the Kui people of Orissa in the Kondh Hills. Christian proclamation, service and institutions as modes of Christian communication and their impact on people are examined. The Kui converts' role as agents was vital in the process of communication and conversion. The period covered is from the campaign against Kondh human sacrifice in the 1830s to the conversion movement of the 1960-70s. Evidence is gathered from personal and group interviews conducted among first-generation converts using the qualitative research method, and also from the archival, library and Mission sources.

Significantly, many tribal and Dalit communities embraced Christianity and led large-scale indigenous conversion movements at a time when all or most missionaries had left. Yet many critics in India view these conversions as western missionary products or achieved through force or inducements. They regard the non-literate tribals as passive recipients, and their initiative in conversion is ignored. These explanations fundamentally lack the voice of the very participants of conversion.

I argue that in accounting for religious conversion the indigenous perspective is the primary reality and the converts are the true agents; that the motivation and meaning of the conversions need to be found first of all in the converts' witness and in the role and impact of Christian communication, which influenced the decision for conversion. The five major means of communication which I have studied in the Baptist Mission and the Kui Church are: first, the person or message-bearer, the western missionary or Kui Christian him/herself, who was a medium of the message, both consciously and inadvertently. Secondly, the spoken word, in preaching and otherwise, which was a principal form used in direct evangelism. Thirdly, the written word which was no less important as a major medium, despite very low literacy. The printed Bible in the mother-tongue mediated the gospel in depth and became a prized possession. Fourthly, education which was a vehicle of Christianisation and modernisation and facilitated the important indigenous Christian leadership development. Fifthly, the medical mission work which visibly communicated God's care and sent out a message of the power and credibility of the Christian gospel. The sustained mission work, from a basis in the gospel and the message it communicated, made a considerable impact on the Kui.

The conclusions demonstrate that each of these five major means of Christian communication has played a vital part and has had considerable impact in conversion. These conversions have come about in time and terms preferred and acted on by the converts, and they have developed a distinctive way of being a church which may even be at odds with, and differ from, the expectations of the missionaries.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis has been possible with the inspiration, contribution and support of many people, and I would like to thank them all. I would like first of all to thank my supervisors Dr Elizabeth Koepping, Professor Duncan Forrester and Dr Jolyon Mitchell for their invaluable insights and scholarship, and their patience with which they have guided me through this research. At the initial stage Dr Mitchell helped me to focus on my own context. Professor Forrester's advice helped me to steady the structural frame of this thesis and to maintain academic objectivity. Dr Koepping has thoroughly guided me on the theoretical aspects and made detailed observations and comments. Both Dr Koepping and Professor Forrester have been supportive throughout the process of my research and writing giving all the necessary guidance, time and advice. I am very grateful to them.

This thesis is about people and without their contributions this thesis would not have been possible. I would like to thank all the Kui friends whom I have interviewed, for their willingness and co-operation in sharing their life stories with me. Along with them the many friends whom I met and talked with and those who welcomed me and provided hospitality, I will remain deeply indebted to all of them.

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## Abbreviations

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| BBSR    | Bhubaneswar   |
| BJP     | Bharatiya Janata Party                                  |
| BMS     | Baptist Missionary Society                              |
| CBCNI   | Council of Baptist Churches in North India              |
| CCO     | Calcutta Christian Observer                             |
| CMAI    | Christian Medical Association of India                  |
| CMS     | Centre for Mission Studies                              |
| CNI     | Church of North India                                   |
| CUP     | Cambridge University Press                              |
| EIC     | East India Company                                      |
| EMIS    | Evangelism and Missions Information Service             |
| EPW     | Economic and Political Weekly                           |
| GBMS    | General Baptist Missionary Society                      |
| GU      | Ghumsur Udaygiri  |
| ISPCK   | Indian Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge |
| JRAS    | Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society                    |
| KHDCU   | Kondh Hills District Church Union                       |
| MABS    | Madras Auxiliary of the Bible Society                   |
| NCCI    | National Christian Council of India                     |
| NISWASS | National Institute of Social Works And Social Sciences  |
| NIV     | New International Version                               |
| NT      | New Testament   |
| OMP     | Orissa Mission Press                                    |
| OT      | Old Testament   |
| OUP     | Oxford University Press                                 |
| SC      | Scheduled Caste   |
| SPCK    | Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge        |
| ST      | Scheduled Tribe   |
| TRACI   | Theological Research and Communication Institute        |

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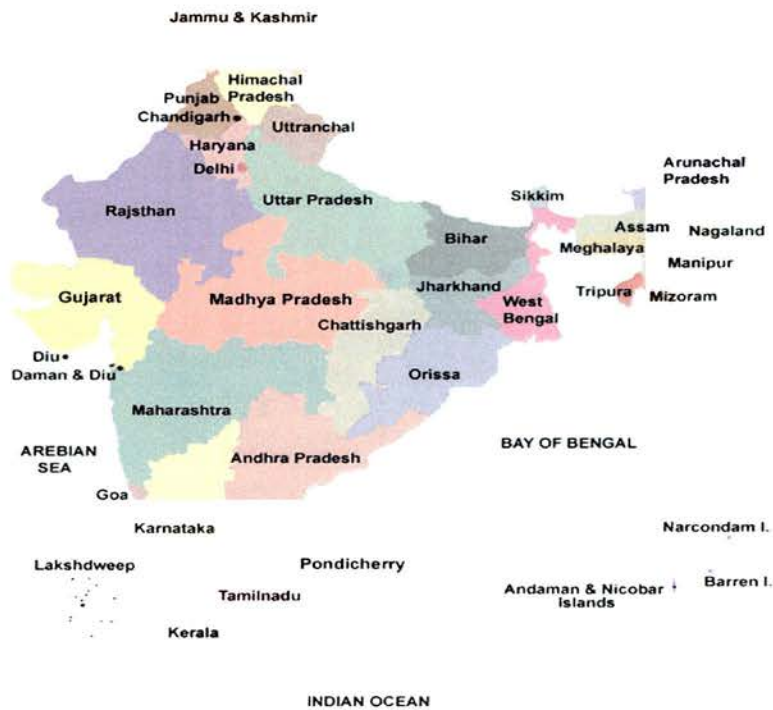
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## ORISSA 2001



<http://www.censusindia.net/results/2001maps/orissa.jpeg>





## INTRODUCTION

This thesis argues in relation to the Kondhs and Pans of Orissa that the converts of the so-called mass movements<sup>1</sup> deal at an intellectual level with conversion, decide if, and when to convert and do so if and when they wish. Reducing the subaltern<sup>2</sup>--as in the case of the Kui people, the Dalit Pans and tribal Kondhs of Orissa—to hapless products of missionary power ignores the role and impact of Gospel communication and fails to recognise the fact of the leadership and participation of the converts in the conversion process. The decisions to convert in the mass conversion were on the whole indigenous decisions, “in the hands and heads of the converts.”<sup>3</sup>

Behind the final decisions, however, lies a long process of hearing, seeing, remembering, reflecting, and also reading about the new religion, the Gospel or Christianity. Any study of conversion, if it is to be well-rounded and reflect reality on the ground, must take the communication of the Gospel into account and the potential converts’ response over time. Explanations based on the ineluctable sway of the western missionary or equally patronising nationalistic views on conversion are inadequate.<sup>4</sup> Interpretations of subaltern conversion have emphasised either its socio-political and economic nature and seen a radical change in conversion or pointed out the assimilation, accommodation and synthesis in religious change from a historical and anthropological perspective. However, studying such conversions from a Christian communication perspective, taken for granted in Christianity but otherwise ignored or misunderstood, which emphasises the role of communication process and its impact in the Christianisation process would provide a fresh understanding.

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<sup>1</sup> Large-group conversions from among the low castes of India which began to take place from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were commonly termed as ‘mass movements’. See Pickett, J Waskom. *Christian Mass Movements in India: A Study with Recommendations*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1933.

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘subaltern’ is defined in the context of caste and aboriginal identity in India. See *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> Karlsson, Bengt G. “Entering into the Christian Dharma: Contemporary “Tribal” Conversions in India” in Brown, J M and Frykenberg, R E (Ed). *Christians, Cultural Interactions, and India's Religious Traditions*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, p. 137.

<sup>4</sup> The debate and interpretations about the causes and motivations of conversions in India are long, lingering and much politicised; it was intensified in recent years during the government of the right wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies. For an overview on the debate over conversions and the conflicting arguments from many sides of the debate see Kim, Sebastian. *In Search of Identity: Debates on Religious Conversions in India*. Oxford: OUP, 2003.

This thesis studies conversions among the Kui people of Orissa, in India from a communication perspective. My research focuses on five major modes of communication of the Christian gospel and knowledge, and examines their impact on the process of conversion. I myself share, to an extent, a common culture and faith with the Kui Christians, as a neighbouring Oriya from the same Orissa state and as a fellow Christian from the same denominational background. This therefore gives me some understanding of the internal system relating to the phenomena of the Kui Christian conversion, though I cannot claim to have an emic view. Evidence has been gathered from personal and group interviews conducted among first-generation converts using the qualitative research method, and also from archival, library and Mission sources closely related to the Kui mission.

A. The Kui People. The Kui community in the Kondh hills constitute the Kondhs—aboriginal tribal and a majority, and the Pans—outcaste Dalits who have been living next to Kondh villages for centuries. Together they constitute the Kui community and speak Kui.<sup>5</sup> The Pans follow Kondh beliefs and customs and assume a lower status, Pans of the plains speak Oriya and follow Hindu customs. In the past, the Pans served the Kondhs in various ways, procuring victims for Kondh human sacrifice (called Meria), as middlemen, farming labourer, musicians, messengers, weavers and scavengers. The Kondhs consider them clever and depend on their services. Today, some Pans continue the traditional services but many, becoming literate, have moved on to white and blue collar jobs.

The Kondhs are the largest of the sixty two tribal groups living in Orissa, numbering just over a million: the majority live in the Kondhmal district.<sup>6</sup> They are the original inhabitants and ruled the hills. However, Oriya incomers and prosperous Pans have increasingly taken over Kondh lands, and the Oriyas dominate business.<sup>7</sup> Kondhmal district lies in the central part of Orissa state, forms part of the Eastern

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<sup>5</sup> The Kui seem to have a maximum variation of their name such as, Kui, Kuvi, Kandh, Kandhi, Kondh, Khond, Khondi, Kodu and Kond. The majority of Kui call themselves either Kui or Kuinga people. The Oriyas call them Kandha. (See Winfield, W W. *A Grammar of the Kui Language*. Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1928, pp.226-7). Till recently the most general term used was Kond, preferred and familiarised by the missionaries. But the present and more Oriyanised use is Kondh.

<sup>6</sup> Others live in the adjacent districts of Ganjam, Gajapati, Koraput, Rayagada, Kalahandi, Boud and some other districts.

<sup>7</sup> Bailey suggests that the Oriya infiltration began some three to four hundred years ago. See Bailey, F G. *Caste and the Economic Frontier: A Village in Highland Orissa*: Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957.



Ghats, with plateau of 2000 feet elevation, broken by numerous mountains and jungle areas.<sup>8</sup>

Mission societies, such as the BMS dealt with in this thesis, were among the first to extend their mission to the tribals living in remote areas. The missionaries lived and itinerated among the people, preaching to them and counselling and helping people in their various struggles and predicaments. For missionary work they also depended on local people's help, ranging from coolies and camp followers to language Pundits and evangelists. These approaches struck a chord with the tribals who otherwise were suspicious of outsiders, for historical and political reasons. In Orissa, the Pans and Kondhs are generally regarded as untouchables by outsiders and described in terms implying backwardness, like *adivasi* (primitive), *vanvasi/vanuajati* (inhabitants of the wild) or *avarna* (outside the caste system and also unclean). The mission welcomed the people without regard to their social and ethnic status. The mission became a bridge in the gap (or rather the gulf) between the tribal and the dominant plains traditions, and a catalyst for social and religious change.

**B. Gospel Communication.** Communication of the Christian gospel was and is at the heart of the Christian mission. Studies focusing on the transmission of the Christian message, which was central to the mission operation, and its impact, would enable a more comprehensive and valid understanding of conversion than has been the case so far. This study will bridge a gap in understanding the religious conversions of the tribal communities, one of the complex and controversial dimensions of the Christian existence in India that is yet to be fully explored.

Scholars and missionaries, at least since Hendrik Kraemer (1938), have drawn attention to the vital role of modern communication in Christian mission.<sup>9</sup> Eugene Nida (1960) emphasised the role of modern communication and mass media principles in mission methods.<sup>10</sup> Charles Kraft carried forward the work of Nida and asserted that Christian mission theologically and in its method is essentially

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<sup>8</sup> See Patnaik, N R. *History and Culture of Kondh Tribes*. New Delhi: Commonwealth Publications, 1992.

<sup>9</sup> Kraemer, H. *Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*. London: Edinburgh House Press, 1938 and also *Communication of the Christian Faith*. London: Lutterworth, 1957.

<sup>10</sup> Nida, Eugene. *Bible Translating: An Analysis of Principles and Procedures, with Special Reference to Aboriginal Languages*. New York: American Bible Society, 1947. See also, by the same author, *Mission and Message: Communication of the Christian Faith*. New York: Harper, 1960.



communication (1979/1991).<sup>11</sup> Others such as David Hesselgrave (1980) and Viggo Sogaard (1993) similarly have argued for communication principles and strategy for cross-cultural mission.<sup>12</sup> The world Protestant Mission Conference in Willowbank, Bermuda in 1978, in the follow up of the Lausanne Congress of World Evangelisation 1974, said that current communication theory and practices should be utilized to maximise the initial effect and the continuity of the missionary message in traditional cultures.<sup>13</sup> The evangelistic task from the beginning of modern mission has involved multi-pronged attempts and forms of communication— preaching, teaching, literacy, translation, print and its mass distribution, and such aspects of human communication as contact, counselling, care and itineration. As Frykenberg puts it,

The “mission” of accurately communicating the gospel, of spreading it to the far ends of the earth, was and is an imperative...Since, in India, this imperative has always extended beyond the constraints of caste and culture, the “alien” and “intrusive” features of communication, as the quintessential missionary activity, have always been, in some measure, unavoidable.<sup>14</sup>

In the Kondh hills mission, the gospel was communicated through more than one mode or medium and in regular and systematic ways. In the dynamics of communication not only the message which was preached, but the persons who brought it, the channels they used and the service they rendered in mission all influenced and communicated. Christian communication opened windows to new ideas to come into the Kondh hills, it created new identities for its participants and challenged traditional patterns of living and thereby contributed to change. I have chosen five major modes and examined them in this thesis, which played a substantial part in continuously transmitting the Christian message to the hills people.

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<sup>11</sup> Kraft, C H. *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Maryknoll N Y: Orbis Books, 1979 and *Communication Theory for Christian Witness*. NY: Orbis, 1991.

<sup>12</sup> Hesselgrave, David J. *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*. Allahabad: St. Paul's Publications, 1981 and also *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980 and Sogaard, Viggo. *Media in Church and Mission: Communicating the Gospel*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1993.

<sup>13</sup> Coote, R T and Stott, J (Ed). *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity, The Papers of the Lausanne Consultation on Gospel and Culture* (1978 Willowbank, Bermuda) Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980.

<sup>14</sup> Frykenberg, Robert E (Ed). *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, pp.2-3.

**1. The Persons** or the message-bearers themselves were message, as well as the source of the message. These persons who lived close to people, interacted and maintained contact and relationship are examined for their personal impact. The impact of their life-style, practices, vulnerability and interactions communicated in addition to what they spoke or preached. They are examined as the channel and message of the Christian gospel and knowledge. First the Christian EIC officers, then the missionaries and more closely the community of converted Christians whose personal lives were observed and scrutinised, made their impression.

**2. The Spoken Word** was the direct and deliberate mode of presenting the gospel through preaching and personal conversation. For the Kui oral community and pre-literate majority it was the common and preferred mode of communication. The evangelists and pastors were all Kui. They were the Kui voice of the mission, worked in its frontiers sharing the gospel and their own Christian experiences mostly through word of mouth. The spoken word implied personal presence, contact and quality relationship therefore it was more likely to have an impact.

**3. The Written Word** was preferred and emphasised by the Baptist Mission, preoccupied with the Bible translation and Christian literature. The written Scripture was accorded prominence of place and much importance was given to its wider presentation through translation, print and distribution. The Kui Bible was a new identity of the language and the Book was an object of power. Written word introduced a new culture of reading, writing and communicated new ideas and messages, modern and Christian which had potential for change in thought and action.

**4. Education** and literacy development was a powerful tool of religious as well as social change. It facilitated reading, writing and access to knowledge and information. Education breached the tribal cultural mould and pushed the Kondhs out of their traditional isolation. Much of the reading material was Christian in content and the Bible being the main book. Kui medium education was introduced by the Mission and attracted the Kui to literacy. The Pans and Kondhs, seen as most unlikely and 'unworthy' of education in traditional thinking, were provided equal educational opportunity. Education was a silent force of a revolution and Christianisation.

**5. The Medical Mission** brought modern medicine, nursing care and success in healing to a very needy situation. The Christian hospital, the only one in a vast neglected and deprived area, was yet another instrument of change affecting the

physical, social, economic and religious life of people. Healing was linked to religion both in tribal and Christian beliefs. The medical mission had a Christian message and a powerful one. It was visible, symbolic and practical manifestations of the Christian message.

The above five major mission outlets represented and transmitted the Christian message but the ultimate agents of conversion were the Kui themselves who made the choice to accept or reject and participate or withhold. This role and initiative of the Kui converts will be noted throughout the thesis and is the focus of the final chapter.

Among the tribal Kui, their own social communication dynamics played a decisive role in the spread of the gospel and in the conversion movement. The converts, as family, friend or those working as evangelists, could testify to their new faith more credibly than could any preacher from outside. The Kui evangelist was the voice of the gospel from within. In terms of communication, the gospel shared by the 'native' speakers in nuanced and idiomatic language and narrative could touch the hearts and imagination of their own people. In terms of impact, they could address their tribal and community concerns and aspirations in the new light of the Christian gospel like no one else could. The conversion stories and news, talked about in village markets or 'gossiped' by kinship-relations (*'bira-toru-rai'*), had a transfer effect on the community. The Pans who had traditionally served as village messengers and middlemen fitted well in their new role as evangelists and Christian messengers or counsellors.

Not all missionaries and their methods or means were successful in terms of communication. The story of mission is not only about communication but also miscommunication, failure and lack of communication. Some missionaries learned the language and local customs well, while others remained paternalistic, judgemental and failed to appreciate traditional values and cultural dynamics. There remained gaps in communication, relationship, status and even attitude. However, generally the missionaries were respected and liked by the Kui and some missionary methods were sound and effective; utilising the ministry and intelligence of the Kui converts and gradually delegating power and authority to them were good examples. However, conversions were neither automatic nor ill-advised but decided upon after years of careful observation, scrutiny and consideration by the converts.

C. Converts. Most studies on tribal conversions are patronising and ignore any role or rational choice by the converts. This is due to a negative stereo-typing of the tribal as primitive and backward; the tribal convert is regarded as mindless, devoid of any decision-making ability and a passive victim of proselytisation.<sup>15</sup> This view denies subjectivity, agency or choice to the convert and is a perspective based on a sort of “social Darwinism” which places the aboriginal at the lowest rung of civilisation. It is elitist and racist and is a view which is not held by the European alone. Colonial ethnologist Edward Dalton doubted if the Kondhs had any religion of their own, “it is quite possible that such a system (religion) may have been gradually built up for them by Brahmans, Gosains and other Hindus...”<sup>16</sup> Ghurye, among the foremost Indian sociologists, described the tribals as ‘backward Hindus’; a view also common among many bureaucrats involved in tribal “development”.<sup>17</sup>

The actual subjects of conversion were the converts themselves; they were the actors and agents of the conversion movement. There are several factors and circumstances involved in tribal conversions but the “agency is finally in the hands and heads of the converts themselves.” says Bengt Karlsson commenting on tribal conversions in India.<sup>18</sup> And further he adds that “even situations of unequal power relations offer some space for action and negotiation on the part of the weak or subaltern.”<sup>19</sup> In the process of conversion the tribals have often negotiated and adapted the message and accepted social and personal consequences resulting from their crucial decision for religious change. Talal Asad, emphasising the converts’ critical role puts it rhetorically, “why is it so important in recent works on religious conversion to see converts as the agents?”<sup>20</sup> I address this question in examining the Kondh conversions in the post-independent Orissa. Jean and John Comaroff’s influential study on the Christianization of South Africa holds the view that conversion was cultural imperialism, but nevertheless recognises the element of

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<sup>15</sup> Today’s tribal and Dalit point out that the caste peoples’ repudiation and spurning of them go back to millennia of years since the Laws of Manu (c1500 BC), the Vedic teacher, if not to the Vedas themselves. Even tribals, outside the purview of Hindu caste, are not entirely free from the stigma of untouchability. See Massey, James. *Indigenous People: Dalits; Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate*. Delhi: ISPCK, 1994.

<sup>16</sup> Dalton, E T. *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*. Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1872, p. 296.

<sup>17</sup> Ghurye, S G. *The Aborigines—So-called and their Future*. London: Transaction Books, 1980.

<sup>18</sup> Karlsson, Bengt G. “Entering into the Christian Dharma: Contemporary “Tribal” Conversions in India.” In Brown, J M and R E Frykenberg (Ed). *Christians, Cultural Interactions, and India's Religious Traditions*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, p. 137.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 138.

<sup>20</sup> Asad, Talal. “Comments on Conversion” in Veer, Peter van der (Ed). *Conversions to Modernities: The Globalization of Christianity*. New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 271.

choice or agency of the African converts.<sup>21</sup> Conversion movements among the subaltern in India are also viewed as social protests, or Christianisation as social mobilisation by the tribals and Dalits akin to sanskritization, a social theory introduced by M N Srinivasan which examines avenues of caste mobility within Hindu social structure.<sup>22</sup> Understanding converts as agents is a 'perspective from below', from the subjects of conversion, and relates to the ultimate forces and actors on the ground.

The converts made the final choice in conversion and it is they who initiated and led in many indigenous conversion movements which took place in tribal communities in the post-missionary era. Significant tribal conversion movements took place in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in the North Eastern states, and in the states of Orissa, Gujarat and Maharashtra where western missionary presence and influence was either not existent or negligible. The missionary presence and control were fading as they were leaving the country by this time. The converts initiated, sought baptism, built their own churches (normally huts) and also moulded their own kind of Christianity, selecting elements of the new religion and continuing many old and everyday customs. The people's response to the gospel was in terms, time and manner their own. The Kondh judgement and decision in conversion is evident both in their rejection of Christianity during the Mission era and embracing it later in large numbers at their own chosen time. The ability, enthusiasm, leadership and participation of the converts drove the movement. This group is at the centre of the thesis.

In the Kondh conversion movement the people commonly heard the gospel from their fellow Kui. The Kui converts (Pans and Kondhs) held the key to the communication of the gospel, to the decision process in conversion and achieved the results. The evangelists and pastors were in the forefront of the movement and their number always far exceeded the missionaries. Missionaries provided the initial useful administrative and institutional support but for the evangelisation and the diffusion of the gospel they depended heavily on the Kui pastors and evangelists who knew their people's mind, real needs and aspirations. It is the skills, participation and active leadership of these Kui evangelist-pastors and volunteers which achieved the results. In the dynamics of power relationship between the tribal Kondh and the

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<sup>21</sup> Comaroff, Jean and John. *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*. Vol.1. London: University of Chicago Press, 1991, See chapter six "Conversion and Conversation".

<sup>22</sup> Srinivas, M N. *Social Change in Modern India*. Bombay: Allied Publisher, 1966.



minority Pan of the same Kui community, and between the Kui and the dominant Oriya, conversion was also often an instrument in the hands of the convert to maintain the balance and resist dominance.

The tribal and Dalit conversion movements in India have been generally interpreted from political and socio-economic suppositions.<sup>23</sup> Assumptions of such interpretations include that being poor and simple the tribals converted for purely material reasons. Such assumptions are more pronounced in recent years in anti-conversion writings and utterances.<sup>24</sup> But missionary charity, education or medical care, were open to all in the Kondh hills irrespective of religion, caste and status. Moreover, not all Kui people who received missionary charity converted, neither could all conversions be traced to Christian charity.

The emphases by scholars on the outward factors or changes alone failed to see a genuine spiritual search among the converts, or to see that Christianity was inherently attractive to them. Conversion is an internal as well as an outward process. The internal process is not easy to uncover and it is the convert alone who bears testimony to it. To the religious minded among them conversion is the work of God and not an act of human will. Conversion for them was a search for a more satisfying spiritual life and in response to the struggles they were facing. This story is largely absent in the literature on tribal conversions.

**D. Interpretations.** The attention of scholars turned to the study of conversion movements from the beginning of the last century. The issue generated much interest, contention and debate including among the missionaries.<sup>25</sup> Earlier writings on the subject include Whitehead (1913), Clough (1914), Warne (1915). A *Mass Movement Quarterly* began to be published around the same time and many denominational Mission reports on 'Mass Movements' appeared during those early decades. A survey on conversion movements was taken up by J Waskom Pickett,

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<sup>23</sup> See Sahay, K. N. "A Theoretical Model for the Study of Christianization Process Among Tribal People of Chotanagpur" in Buddhadeb Choudhary (Ed). *Tribal Transformation in India*, vol. V, *Religions, Rituals and Festivals. Tribal Studies in India Series* (T151), New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1992. Also Sahay, K N. *Christianity and Culture Change in India*. Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1986. On Kui conversions see Padel, Felix. *Sacrifice of Human Beings: British Rule and Kondhs of Orissa*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995.

<sup>24</sup> For a recent discussion on the issue see Karlsson, Bengt G. "Entering into Christian Dharma: Contemporary "Tribal" Conversions in India" in Brown and Frykenberg (Ed). *Christians, Cultural Interactions, and India's Religious Traditions*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002, pp. 133-153.

<sup>25</sup> Sebastian C H Kim. *In Search of Identity: Debates on Religious Conversion in India*. Oxford: OUP, 2003.

directed by the National Christian Council.<sup>26</sup> Pickett wrote that such a research study was taken up because many missionaries doubted and questioned the genuineness of these conversions.

Since the beginning of Christian mass movements in connection with Protestant missions large and influential sections of the missionary body and of the Indian Church have questioned their spiritual validity and have doubted whether they should be encouraged...Many missionaries and Indian ministers testify to the doubts they experienced before receiving and baptising groups...new missionaries have rarely failed to question the rightness of the policy.<sup>27</sup>

Subsequent studies on these conversions have been made from various socio-political, historical, anthropological perspectives. Geoffrey Oddie argued that these conversions were 'social protests' against caste disabilities to achieve social change.<sup>28</sup> Duncan Forrester observed that the socio-political changes introduced by the Raj caused social dislocations. Sanskritization allowed limited mobilisation within the caste structure and not outside it. So a "conversion movement is like a kind of group identity crisis in which the group passes through a negative rejection of their lowly place in Hindu society to a positive affirmation of a new social and religious identity."<sup>29</sup> Oddie and Forrester, and also Fernandez (1981), Gladstone (1984) Massey (1995), Hrangkhuma (1998) and Jeyakumar (1999) among others emphasised the socio-political nature and the radical change in conversion.

Others, particularly those with a cultural anthropology perspective, perceived synthesis and accommodation. Rather than radical discontinuity, they see a sharing of beliefs and practices and a forging of links with other religions. Susan Bayly's study of South Indian Christianity found "Christianity...adjusting once again to the cultural traditions and social organisation of the people amongst whom it took root."<sup>30</sup> A similar conclusion is reached by Robinson about Christian conversions in

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<sup>26</sup> The participating missions and areas were "The Church Missionary Society's work in the Kistna (Krishna) District of the Madras Presidency (Telugu), the London Missionary Society's work in South Travancore (Tamil), the Gossner's Evangelical Lutheran Mission work in Chota Nagpur (Hindi), the Methodist Episcopal work in the Western United Provinces (Urdu), and the United Presbyterian work in the Punjab (Punjabi)." Pickett, Waskom. *Christian Mass Movements in India: A Study with Recommendations*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1933, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Oddie, G A. *Social Protest in India: British Protestant Missionaries and Social Reforms 1850-1900*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1979. *Religious Conversion Movements in South Asia: Continuities and Change, 1800-1900*. Richmond: Curzon, 1997.

<sup>29</sup> Forrester, Duncan B. *Caste and Christianity: Attitudes and Policies on Caste of Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions in India*. London: Curzon Press, 1980, p. 77.

<sup>30</sup> Bayly, S. *Saints, Goddesses and Kings...*, p. 9.

Goa.<sup>31</sup> Webster, who focused on conversions among Punjab's Dalits pointed out "For most Punjabi Christians the context in which they converted did not change"<sup>32</sup> Studies with similar conclusions have been produced from other Asian and African contexts. Elizabeth Koepping, examining the conversion and identity issues among the Kadazan of Borneo from a micro-anthropological perspective, asserted that while some converts "may indeed depend on 'orthodox' content and boundaries" for others, conversion "may be more a matter of changing friends and food than of changing ideology."<sup>33</sup> American Anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff found the South African tribal conversion simply part of a "more embracing historical transformation."<sup>34</sup>

E. Explanations. Academic explanations of Christian conversions have been Euro-centric and/or western missionary-centric, and have emphasised the colonial rule or/and the western missionary's role as primary catalyst and the instrument of conversion. The Euro-centric theories of conversion are linked to views on the relationship of colonialism and missions in many post-colonial historiographies, political, anthropological and other academic studies. For example, historian K M Panikkar suggested that Christian Mission progressed mainly through aggressive imperial advancement.<sup>35</sup> Arun Shourie claimed that British administrators, missionaries and indologists constituted a team and worked together with the aim of the subversion of Hinduism.<sup>36</sup> Felix Padel's study of British colonialism and the Kondhs of Orissa claimed that colonialism was part and parcel of the Christian mission in a subtle way.<sup>37</sup> Stephen Neill, in his comprehensive *Colonialism and Christian Missions*, however, warned that the use of the term "colonialism" is fairly

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<sup>31</sup> Robinson Rowena. *Conversion, Continuity and Change: Lived Christianity in Southern Goa*. New Delhi: Sage, 1998.

<sup>32</sup> Webster, John C B. "Christian Conversion in the Punjab: What Has Changed" in Robinson, R and S Clarke (Ed). *Religious Conversion in India*, p. 373-374.

<sup>33</sup> Koepping, E. "Family, State and Religious Conversion: Multiple Discourses from Malaysia and South Australia" in *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (Autumn 2000), p. 141.

<sup>34</sup> Comaroff, Jean and John. *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*. Vol.1. London: University of Chicago Press, 1991, p. 250. See chapter six "Conversion and Conversation".

<sup>35</sup> Panikkar, K M. *Asia and Western Dominance: A Survey of the Vasco da Gama Epoch of Asian History, 1498-1945*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1953.

<sup>36</sup> Shourie, Arun. *Missionaries in India: Continuities, Changes and Dilemmas*. New Delhi: ASA Publications, 1994.

<sup>37</sup> Padel, Felix. *Sacrifice of Human beings: British Rule and the Kondhs of Orissa*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995.



recent in historiography and cautioned against any generalised conclusions of a common agenda and objective of mission and colonisation.<sup>38</sup> Tim Gorringe pointed out that,

The historian of the early British mission to India, J C Marshman, believed that the Government never at any time identified itself with the missionary cause, and Neill, himself bishop of Tirunelveli in the 1940s, felt that an attitude of unfriendliness towards missions never entirely ceased to exist as long as British rule was maintained in India...

Two hundred British missionaries urged the Round Table conference in 1930 to accept the wishes of the people of India with respect to independence.<sup>39</sup>

The East India Company (EIC) which effectively introduced the colonial rule in India was clearly in conflict with the missionary interests. Until 1813, that is for over 200 years, it banned missionaries' entry, fearing they would disturb the Company's prospects. Unlike the Portuguese in Goa, for the British, "mission was not co-terminous with colonial expansion."<sup>40</sup> Conversely missionary opposition to EIC policies, to colonial rule and support for Gandhi's nationalist cause is also known.<sup>41</sup> A good example of EIC-Missions tension is the first two missionaries to Orissa. William Bampton and James Peggs attacked the British EIC's policy of patronage of the Puri Jagannath Temple stating it aided and abetted idolatry and superstition.<sup>42</sup> Frykenberg asserts that most of the prominent missionaries like Allan Hume, C F Andrews, Verrier Elwin, J N Farquhar, E Stanley Jones, Edward Thompson and Amy Carmichael gave broad and substantial support to the *Swaraj* (self-rule) movements.<sup>43</sup> He goes on to say,

At no time in the history of India did anything like a majority of missionaries in India, whether British or non-British, show a predisposition in favour of colonialism...

<sup>38</sup> Neill, Stephen. *Colonialism and Christian Missions*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1966.

<sup>39</sup> Gorringe, T J. *Furthering Humanity: A Theology of Culture*. Hants: Ashgate, 2004, p. 186 and footnote 41.

<sup>40</sup> Clarke, Sathianathan, "Conversion to Christianity in Tamil Nadu", in Robinson and Clarke (Ed). *Religious Conversion in India*, p. 325.

<sup>41</sup> O'Conner, Daniel. *Gospel, Raj, and Swaraj: The Missionary Years of C.F. Andrews, 1904-14*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1990.

<sup>42</sup> The Company's wholehearted management of thousands of Hindu temples and turning blind eyes to issues like temple prostitution and sacrifice under Jagannath's chariot, which in the eyes of the missionary was all superstition and criminal, caused frequent conflict. See Peggs, James. *India's cries to British humanity, relative to Infanticide, British Connection with Idolatry, Ghaut murders, Suttee, Slavery, and Colonization in India*. London: Simpkin & Marshall, 1832.

<sup>43</sup> Frykenberg, R E. "Christians in India: An Historical Overview of Their Complex Origin" in Frykenberg, R E (Ed). *Christians and Missionaries in India*, pp. 59.

First, missionaries with precolonial, noncolonial and anti-colonial attitudes have always outnumbered those British who might have gone so far as to even think of making India an Establishment fiefdom within Anglican Christendom. Second, the very fact that so many...missionaries were non-British...tended to make missionary opposition to colonialism more pronounced. Third, opposition to the Raj tended to increase in direct proportion to the increase in free, non-denominational, unfettered forms of voluntarism....The last but most important of all reasons not to conflate or confuse Christian missions with Western colonialism rests, very self-evidently, in the essential participation, power and presence of India's own Christians...for example, catechists, pastors, teachers, Bible-women, and such—who did most of the work and who accomplished most of the truly significant results.<sup>44</sup>

Frykenberg, however, does acknowledge that there are some grounds for a “colonialism-conflation theory” in specific instances, but argues “what is more at issue here is an axiomatic conflation. This “perspective from above” that is still fixed within the academy...denies legitimacy or recognition to the critical or serious study of India's Christians in general and of missionaries in particular.”<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, the Mission societies were distinct from the colonial vision in their origin and character, even though aspects of their zeal resonated with some EIC individual ideas and practices. They were the off-shoot of a modern missionary movement and a ‘child of the Evangelical Revival’ in Britain. Andrew Walls remarks, “without the revival, the societies would have been inconceivable.”<sup>46</sup> The Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) came into being in 1792 largely through pastor Carey's instigation through his pamphlet, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of Heathens*, written that year. The hundred odd societies that followed, including those from Europe and America, were voluntary church organisations supported by a membership fired up to preach the Gospel beyond their shores.

The British Empire which followed the EIC, however, was in a sense Christian. Many imperial officers were professed Christians and many missionaries were apologists for the Empire.<sup>47</sup> The missionaries sought government protection and the government conveniently turned its task of education or health care to missionaries. In India, where sacred and secular are not split, a close relationship between missionaries and the colonial government was perceived. Lal Dena called it

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<sup>44</sup> Frykenberg. “Christians in India, pp. 59-60.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> Walls, Andrew F. *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996, p. 9.

<sup>47</sup> See Bearce, George D. *British Attitudes Towards India, 1784-1858*. London: Oxford University Press, 1961.

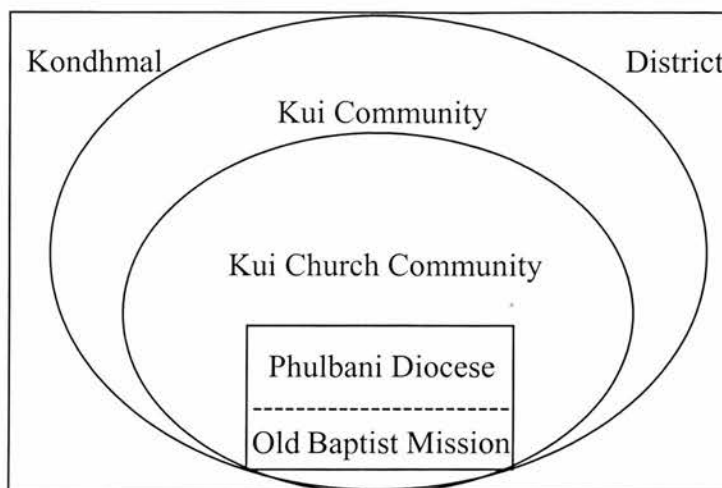
a mutual relationship, based not on 'ideological confluence' but one which "grew out of necessity and expediency."<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless the objectives of the government and missionaries remained fundamentally different and colonisation and Christianisation were often in conflict.

The Western missionary-centric explanations viewed that missionary power, influence and intellect alone achieved the conversions. It viewed that tribal conversions were a missionary imposition on the people against their will. This implied that conversion is a one-way process where the missionary implants his alien faith in the converts, replacing one faith with another, attributing unlimited power to the missionary. Such explanations are inadequate, academic and a perspective from above which does not take into consideration the converts' perspective from below. It contrasts with the fact that many more western missionaries and their missions did not experience any significant conversion movements and many more tribes exposed to similar missionary preaching and service did not convert to Christianity. Contrary to the view of missionary monopoly, they actually depended on the 'native' preachers and evangelists for effective and accurate communication in evangelisation. This group had the depths of cultural and social access as community member, which the missionaries did not.

F. The Mission Frame. The BMS Mission and the Kui Church were established and well organised institutions. The Church represented a new and organised identity and offered a Christian alternative to the traditional society under pressure from Oriyanisation and Hinduisation. Propagation and service were the vital Christian communication that transmitted the message of the Mission and the Church and was potential for change. I have used the term 'Mission' denoting the Mission society or the body of the organisation and 'mission' denoting the task, service, goal or ministry of the organisation, which was principally to spread or communicate the Christian gospel and faith. Similarly 'Church' refers to the Kui church while 'church' is used in normal generic way. The following diagram depicts that the churches in the old Baptist mission have been formed into the Diocese of Phulbani (the former name of the district) and the Kui Christians form a distinct community within the larger Kui community.

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<sup>48</sup> Dena, Lal. *Christian Missions and Colonialism: A Study of Missionary Movement in Northeast India With Particular Reference to Manipur and Lusai Hills 1894-1947*. Shillong: Vendrame Institute, 1988, p. 117.



**1. BMS Mission in the Kondh Hills.**<sup>49</sup> The Baptist mission first brought the Gospel to the Kondh hills. However, before the Mission, Christian ideas and knowledge first entered the hills through the British East India Company (EIC) officers, who led a campaign from 1835 against the human sacrifices, called ‘Meria’, and the female infanticides, regularly practiced by the Kondhs. Their campaign involved force, and also intense negotiations, persuasions and education initiatives, which revealed their Christian ethical understanding in their interactions.

The missionaries arrived late.<sup>50</sup> The General Baptist Missionary Society (GBMS)<sup>51</sup> sent the first missionary, John Orissa Goadby, to the Kondh hills in 1862.<sup>52</sup> Goadby’s stay was short and he visited the hills during winter months only, from a base in the foothill. Regular mission work started from 1891 when the Sub-Magistrate of the hills’ Udaygiri town, a Hindu and a Telugu, requested missionary work. Three missionaries joined encouraged by his initiative, Arthur Long, Abiathar Wilkins and Thomas Wood came and worked from the base Goadby had used. All three died in the mission field of sickness, Wood in few weeks. The GBMS merged with the BMS (Baptist Missionary Society) in 1892, which carried out the mission and the missionaries from BMS moved base to the hills. They began to set up

<sup>49</sup> For a brief history of the beginning of the Kondh hills mission, see Pearce Carey. *Dawn on the Kondh Hills*, 1936, Wells, D S. *Ye Are My Witnesses*, 1942, Barbara Boal. *The Church in the Kond Hills*, 1963.

<sup>50</sup> In 1838 Rev William Brown from the Berhampur Mission, established the previous year, had visited the Kondh hills.

<sup>51</sup> The GBMS was founded in 1816 in Derby through the efforts of Rev J G Pike and in 1822 its first missionaries came to work in Cuttack, Orissa.

<sup>52</sup> He was so named at his birth after his uncle John Goadby, who at that time was sailing to Cuttack, Orissa, to be a missionary (1833-37) there.

schools, and built a hospital in 1939 though the top priority was evangelism. The mission was known for its strict discipline, prohibition and clean habits: Christian ethical and religious practices were emphasised.

**2. The Kui Baptist Church.** With the conversions of a Pan Kui priest and his family of four adults in 1914 the Kui church was born. The first church was the house of John Biswas, a Telugu speaking Indian evangelist who was instrumental in this breakthrough and was recruited by the Mission. The initial converts were mostly Pan and many among them, including the first convert family, were literate and read the Gospel books before conversion. In 1923 the first church building came up in Mallikapodi village built by these converts. In 1931 the first *Deri Sabha* (Great Gathering) of Christians, worshipping in 16 villages by now, was held and in that meeting the Kondh Hills District Church Union (KHDCU) was formed with a Kui as its secretary. By 1936 the KHDCU had a total of forty-four Kui evangelist-pastors, thirty of them honorary.<sup>53</sup> The year 1954 saw a Kui become president of the KHDCU replacing the missionary and the transfer of authority and management began from the Mission to the Church. By that year the church congregations numbered 58 and the membership was around 2000, and was still mostly Pan. Then from 1956 Kondhs began to show an active interest in Christianity. The following years saw increasing number of Kondh families asking for baptism which led to a movement of conversion. The vigour of the movement continued until the end of 1970, confined to the tribal Kondhs, who converted more rapidly than had the Pans. With the formation of the Church of North India (CNI) in which the Baptists joined, the hills Baptist churches came under the Diocese of Cuttack (some did not join and remained independent). Today they are a separate diocese of their own known as the Diocese of Phulbani, the former name of the District.

**G. Research Method.** This study attempts to understand tribal conversions from a distinct perspective focused on Christian communication and the agency of the tribal. A better understanding of the conversions in the mission requires an examination of the modes of Christian communication and its effects. I have tried to understand the Kui conversions from their testimonies and from their points of view. The Baptist Missionary Society which carried out the mission work among the Kui was one of

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<sup>53</sup> *BMS Report*, "Statistics of the Baptist Church and Missionary Work Associated with the BMS (1<sup>st</sup> Oct 1935 to 30<sup>th</sup> Sept 1936): Udaygiri, Kond Hills.



the strictest Christian denominations, emphasised the Bible and its knowledge for every convert, endeavoured to transmit the Christian content through many possible ways and demanded change in moral thinking and behaviour as proof of conversion.

I have drawn evidence from the oral accounts of the converts through personal and group interviews conducted among first-generation converts in select villages of the Kondhmal, Orissa. The converts' narratives are witness accounts and subjective testimonies of conversion and the primary source in my study. The tribal reasons for seeking conversion are manifold and, conversion being a subjective issue, the testimonies of the converts are indispensable and inescapable sources for any study and understanding of it. Most academic writings about Kui social or religious change are views of the scholars which do not include nor often share the views and voices of the Kui, and they often remain beyond the reach of the very people about whom they are written.

I have also drawn upon the missionary accounts, records and publications, interviewed some of the surviving missionaries now retired in UK and collected materials from their personal files and collections. In many cases the missionaries were closer to the people than either the British or Indian officials, and certainly the academics and researchers. I have consulted relevant secondary and archival materials in libraries which include the Baptist Mission archive of Regents Park College in Oxford, the Tribal Research and Welfare Institute and the National Institute of Social Welfare and Social Studies in Bhubaneswar, Orissa. The National Library of Scotland and the libraries of New College, the Centre for Studies of Christianity in the Non-Western World and Edinburgh University have been useful. One of the Kondh hills' missionaries, Barbara Boal, is the only substantial scholar on Kui Christianity and has been an inspiration to me in attempting this study on the Kui conversion movement.<sup>54</sup> The details of the method of research followed are discussed in the following first chapter of this thesis.

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<sup>54</sup> Barbara Boal began to publish her studies from 1963 which appeared as *The Church in the Kond Hills: An Encounter with Animism*. Nagpur: NCCI. Later she submitted her work as a Ph D thesis to Edinburgh University which was published as *The Konds: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*. Wilts: Aris and Phillips, 1982. Her other books include, *Fire is Easy: The Tribal Christian and His Traditional Culture*. Manila: Christian Institute for Ethnic Studies in Asia, 1973. She co-authored *The Konds: A Handbook for Development*. New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1990 and article was published in Hayward, VFW (Ed). *The Church as Christian Community: Three Studies of North India Churches*. London: Lutterworth, 1966. Her last major publication was *Man, the Gods and the Search for Cosmic Wellbeing*. Bhubaneswar: NISWASS, 1999. Among other publications on Kondh Christians are: Pearce Carey. *Dawn on the Kond Hills*. London: The Carey Press, 1936. Missionary memoirs from, Wilkins, E G. *By Hands, Bullocks and Prayers: The Building of the Morrishhead*

H. Chapter Outline. I have identified and investigated five major areas of communication and their impact in conversion, looking into the role they played and their effectiveness and weaknesses or failures as well.

The first chapter describes the methodology followed. The interview process, research participants and methods used in the collection of oral narratives and its analysis are explained. A description of and utilisation of the principles and insights of the Grounded Theory of qualitative research is discussed. Other sources, including published secondary materials and the archival resources accessed and consulted, are also explained.

The second chapter identifies the persons themselves as message. They represented the Christian message, and as the medium of the same, they themselves were message too. People watched their lives, with or without listening to their word of evangelism. Thus the Kui encounter with Christianity was in the persons bringing the gospel to them, as much or as little, as in their word, spoken or written. Therefore as the source, the medium and the message, all in one, the personal and continuous presence and communication of these message-bearers, whether EIC administrators, western missionaries or the larger group of local Kui evangelists, their inevitable impact needs to be examined. This chapter deals with this aspect of communication and role in conversion.

The third and fourth chapters examine the roles of two basic or direct modes of gospel communication in the mission. The spoken word and the written word played a significant role in carrying and communicating the message. The spoken and personal sharing of the Christian message of love and care, through personal presence, contact, visits and by establishing personal relationship were the common ways of evangelisation. This was vital to personal impact and effectiveness in evangelisation and needs attention. The spoken or oral word was not just common but the spoken word was also powerful and dynamic in social and ritual function, and therefore significant to gospel communication.

Missionaries focused their energies on language-learning, Bible translation, preaching, literacy development, writing Kui grammar, composing hymns, printing books and wide distribution of these, which showed a bias and their clear emphasis on the written word. The first converts turned out to be those who could read and

write and were reading the gospel stories before conversion.<sup>55</sup> The role of the written word had been important though limited, as the vast majority was not literate. Introduction and acquiring of writing in the oral-only societies have been a new cultural symbol and status. Perceived as a tool of elitism, power and dominance it has been desirable. The written Kui mostly contained and transmitted the Christian message and therefore was significant for its role in the Christianisation process.

The fifth and sixth chapters focus on educational and medical mission respectively. These Christian social service institutions and their mission are examined for the message they sent out through their visible and often powerful services. Education as a window on outside and wider world and a means of cultural change had a profound role to play. The Mission's educational institutions mainly included the schools, Sunday schools and the hostels, besides also had systematic church based teaching and training programmes. These institutes and their educational works which were based on mission principles, manifested Christian concerns, introduced Christian values and influenced the minds and experiences of its pupils.

The medical mission's message of healing and nursing care was appealing to most in a deprived and remote tribal territory like the Kondh hills. The Mission hospital was popular and was symbolic of healing power of some miraculous proportion. The power of mission healing and the credibility it afforded to the gospel message need investigation for the role in conversion. Therefore the Christian educational and medical engagements signalled new message of prestige, prosperity, welfare and health. It also confronted issues of power, identity, status, human worth, suffering, pain and mortality. The impact and effectiveness of such dynamic and catalytic forces of Christian mission is examined in these two chapters for their role in religious change, which of course is obvious in social change.

The seventh chapter investigates the Kui response to the gospel and their agency in the conversion movement. The Pans, who converted first and many among these early converts became evangelists, carried the gospel to their fellow Kui. Their involvement as message-bearers was vital to the spread of the gospel. The Kondhs did not show interest as late as 1956 then began to ask for baptism. They led a conversion movement which became the largest. Christianity preached and practiced

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<sup>55</sup> The Oriya Brahmin and editor of a religious pamphlet, Gangadhar Sarangi was the first Oriya convert and baptised on March 1828, and the Kui priest Bisi, his family (baptised in April 1914) and the next convert Poto Pradhan were literate and students of the Mission school.



among the people and encountered in the other modes of its communication, mentioned above, influence and impacted their decision. The initiative and the final step in conversion have been primarily their prerogative. In the conversion movement, the motivation and participation of the Kui converts and the dynamics of the Kui social communication drove the movement. The change and transformation in Pan Christians was also a major motivating factor for the Kondhs. This chapter investigates the Kondh encounter with Christianity, the indigenous initiatives and the converts' agency in conversion.

The conclusions demonstrate the role of a regular communication of the Christian gospel through at least five major modes of mission work which introduced the Christian gospel among the Kui people. The converts' encountered Christianity in those various modes of communication. It establishes the converts' initiative and role in the final decision to convert. Moreover their own involvement in leading or participating in a conversion movement among their own community drove the movement. Rather than a mindless capitulation to Christianity by the tribal and Dalit low castes, alleged in debates and anti-conversion rhetoric, the testimonies of the converts are emphatic about what they heard, read, saw and experienced as claimed by Christianity, as factors and reasons behind their decision of conversion. Just as the conversion movement, so the church community it resulted in was indigenous both in its origin and expressions.

## Chapter One

### Introduction of Method and Empirical Research

#### Introduction

This chapter introduces and describes the method of the research, the sources and types of materials consulted and the tool of personal interviews used to collect oral testimonies and qualitative data. The aim was to examine the role of Christian communication of the Mission and the Kui Church in the Kondh hills and its impact on conversion. Christian message was communicated through various ways and the modes of communication involved the message-bearers as the message themselves and also their words and actions. I identified five major modes of communication and examined them separately. They are major categories; other forms of communication are subsumed under them. The five modes are:

1. The persons or message-bearers themselves as message as well as medium.
2. The spoken word of preaching, sharing or personal evangelism.
3. The written word of the Bible/Christian literature in Kui (and Oriya).
4. Mission education's role as Christian communication.
5. Medical mission as the message of the power of the Gospel.

The Kui people's encounter with the Christian message took place mainly through these major modes of communication, which represented, carried and transmitted the message. The Kui converts testify to these as sources of their Christian knowledge. They also make clear that the manner of communication influenced the process of their conversion.

Conversions are generally frowned upon in India. It is common to dismiss tribal and Dalit converts as 'rice Christians' or trivialise them as conversions of convenience. This view suffers from a prejudice that tribals, because of their situation of backwardness in school education and isolation from the 'mainstream' culture, are neither intelligent nor capable of rational judgement and therefore their conversions are trivial and not genuine. In this there is a total disregard of the convert's own view of his/her decision in the matter. The tribal community has proven itself when given the opportunity and support to rise in stature, strength and intelligence and run the political, academic and social organisations and institutions like any other. They have even revolted in the face of deliberate denials of their

rights, privileges and demands. Christianity has often provided opportunity and enablement to tribals and a sense of identity. They have also negotiated and engaged with Christianity at more than one level before becoming Christians.

My aim has been to obtain their testimony, to be a conduit for the voice of the converts who are the active performers in their own conversion but have been disregarded in common articulation of tribal conversion, be it historical, political, anthropological, social or missiological. The memory of the conversion event and days are still vivid in peoples' mind though it is now ten, twenty, thirty or more years for some since they converted and their initial fervour, zeal and spirit may have been dimmed somewhat.

The assumption in the chapter is that, conversion being a subjective experience with personal and social implications, the converts' own testimony and story is a primary source of truth. Subjective and emotional perceptions expressed in oral narrative have been accepted in this study as being as close to reality as we can get and is used as evidence. The Kui conversions were preceded by years of regular Christian communication and the converts themselves played the most vital part in that process. Enthusiastic converts as evangelists or ordinary Christians spread the gospel by telling their conversion stories and persuaded their fellow Kui in conversion. I have conducted personal and group interviews among a select number of first generation converts to collect their stories and views about their conversion. The interviews, in conversational form, were recorded on cassette tapes and then transcribed. This was done in a field research conducted in randomly selected Kui Christian villages in the Kondhmal district spanning three months in 2001.

This chapter describes the process of the oral narrative materials collection and justifies the converts' oral testimony as primary source of information and evidence. For my research I have also drawn from the mission and Church sources, from published and written materials and also through interviews with some missionaries. Among other sources consulted are the relevant anthropological, historical and some miscellaneous writings relating to or relevant to my research topic.

### A. Mission Record and Missionary Sources

The Baptist Missionary Society's records and reports including missionary correspondences, newsletters and magazines are all centrally preserved at the Regents Park College's Angus Library archives in Oxford. Some earlier translations

of the gospel books in the Roman and Oriya script are preserved here: some originals have disappeared. I have collected relevant materials in this library. Original Baptist mission materials now preserved in a new archive in the Serampore College campus was also consulted. Many BMS records have been destroyed. Some housed in the original London premises were destroyed by bombing during the Second World War. All the old books and documents of BMS in Cuttack Theological School were destroyed by the super cyclone of 1999. The *BMS Report* and *The Missionary Herald* remain two good sources for the missionary reports of their work in the Kondh hills.

Barbara Boal's five published books, some co-authored, are a standard source on the life and practice the Kui people.<sup>1</sup> She was a resident missionary between 1950 and 60 and thereafter made some visits. She spoke both Kui and Oriya. Her work on the Kondh human sacrifice and religious change was submitted to the Edinburgh University as a Ph D thesis. Boal utilised earlier observations made by colonial officers and in particular of Major Samuel Macpherson on whom she often relied uncritically.<sup>2</sup> However, she was witness to the events unfolding the conversion movement and the growth of the Church in the hills. I had two opportunities of meeting and interviewing her during her visit to Edinburgh.

I have interviewed six other retired missionaries who served in the Kondh hills Mission and now live in retirement in the UK, meeting personally, by phone, by e-mail and letters. These missionaries, Rev Bruce Henry, Mrs Joyce Henry, Rev Raymond Lewis, Rev Frank Wells and Ms Irene Wright offered their comments and narrated their stories frankly and openly. They provided me with useful written materials which include sermon notes, handouts, teaching/training materials, leaflets, booklets in Kui, Oriya and English and some photographs and old maps. These materials from their personal files and the interview recordings were obtained with permission to use and to quote them as necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> Boal Barbara, *The Church in the Kond Hills: An Encounter with Animism*. Nagpur: The National Christian Council of India, 1963.

\_\_\_\_\_ *The Tribal Christian and His Traditional Culture*. Bangalore: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1973.

\_\_\_\_\_ *The Konds: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*. Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1982

\_\_\_\_\_ *Man, The Gods and the Search for Cosmic Wellbeing*. Bhubaneswar: National Institute of Social Work and Social Sciences, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> As late as 1999 and in her latest publication she writes, "The observations made by Major S C Macpherson of the East India Company in his paper read before the Royal Asiatic Society in London in 1852, remains as true now as then." Boal, Barbara. *Man, The Gods and The Search for Cosmic Wellbeing*, Bhubaneswar: NISWASS, 1999, Preface p. i.

Among the available published writings about the missionary work, Pearce Carey's book, *Dawn on the Kond Hills*, is the earliest one, published in 1936. This book was produced after a visit to the hills and 'six months of the stories exploring' and falls in the category of missionary reporting.<sup>3</sup> D S Wells' brief account of BMS history covering years 1792-1942 with a section on Orissa includes the early years of the Kui mission.<sup>4</sup> Two missionary doctors, Gordon Wilkins and Stanley Thomas, have written their personal reminiscences of their medical ministry and hospital work in the Moorshead Memorial Hospital.<sup>5</sup>

## B. Library and Archival Sources

Books published on Kui Christians and the BMS Mission in the hills are largely by expatriate missionaries. However, in the last twenty years or so some historical and social research on missionary work among the Kui people have been done and published by modern Oriya historians and sociologists. Besides a few occasional lectures, journal articles and other publications have discussed missionary work among the Kui people and cultural changes. They include the works of Dandapani Behera (1984), Nihar R Patnaik (1992), Manjushree Dhall (1997), K Mojumdar, Jayanta Das, B K Behera and others. One substantial critical work has been produced by Felix Padel (1995) who critiques Kui history under the colonial period, mainly chapter six and extensive endnotes from pages 373-383 on missionary work among the Kui.

The special collection section of the University Library and the National Library of Scotland holds the writings of the two leading British figures of Meriah suppression, Major John Campbell<sup>6</sup> and Major Samuel Chartier Macpherson, both Scottish.<sup>7</sup> The New College Library and the Centre For the Study of Christianity in Non-Western World hold useful collections on some general BMS history and

<sup>3</sup> Carey, S Pearce, *Dawn on the Kondh Hills*, London: The Carey Press, 1936, p. Preface.

<sup>4</sup> Wells, D S. *Ye Are My Witnesses: 1792-1942 One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Baptist Missionary Society in India*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1942. See section on Orissa (pp. 107-151).

<sup>5</sup> Wilkins, Dr Gordon. *By Hands, Bullocks and Prayer: The Building of the Moorshead Memorial Hospital, Kond Hills, India*, Worcestershire: Ashford Colour Press, 1987 and Thomas, Dr Stanley. *Journey into Wholeness*. Derby: Moorley's Print and Publishing, 1994.

<sup>6</sup> Campbell, John Sir. *A Personal Narrative of Thirteen Years Service Amongst the Wild Tribes of Khondistan for the Suppression of Human Sacrifice*. London: Hurst and Blackett, 1864.

<sup>7</sup> Macpherson, Major S C. *Memorials of Service in India: From the Correspondence of the Late Major Samuel Charters Macpherson, C.B.* London: J. Murray, 1865.

reports including a "Guide to microfilm of Baptist Missionary Society archives, London, England, 1792-1914" besides books on Mission and Communication.

My research at the archives of the Angus Library, Oxford has been mentioned above. This is the main library and archive housing the records and reference materials relating to the BMS mission. I have used its collections on the Kondh hills Mission. In Orissa, resources at the Orissa Tribal Research & Development Centre and the National Institute for Social Work and Social Sciences, both in Bhubaneswar, were useful. Both organisations take interest in tribal research mainly in areas of anthropological study and developmental work among the sixty two different tribes living in the state. I located in the British Library catalogue some long out of print books in Kui language.

### C. Personal Interviews and Qualitative Research

The primary source on conversions is the stories of the converts collected through recorded and transcribed personal interviews. Oral narratives of the converts are the qualitative research material on conversion, used as the primary source. The interview participants included first generation converts from select villages. Most could speak Oriya, though a few spoke with the help of interpreters. Among them are teachers, Christian leaders serving and retired: others are uneducated lay Christians.

#### 1. Qualitative Research: The Grounded Theory Approach

In preparation for my field research I took a course in qualitative research and personal and focus group interviews methods spread over two terms at the sociology department of the University. I have chosen some approaches of the Grounded Theory of qualitative research in my field study. This theory, proposed in 1967 by Barony Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967) emphasised grounding concepts in data gathered through interviews, like the narratives of life stories of people.<sup>8</sup> Grounded Theory emphasises that the main themes and formulation of theory be allowed to emerge from the data rather than forced into it. It was considered a new approach in sociological research which sought to generate concepts inductively from research data. This method contrasted with the speculative and deductive forms of theorising (particularly the Chicago

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<sup>8</sup> Glaser, Barony and Anselm Strauss. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967.



School) where theories were first conceived or hypothesised and then put to 'testing' against evidence through research.

In Grounded Theory the researcher begins with an idea of study and allows major concepts/themes to emerge from the data. Concepts emerging are more likely to resemble "reality" than theory which is derived by putting together a series of concepts based on experience or solely through speculation, say Strauss and Corbin.<sup>9</sup> Ian Dey's *Grounding Grounded Theory* argues about the theory's popularity and continued relevance in social science research.<sup>10</sup> With regard to the use and application of the theory in empirical studies what has been most common is to utilise some *approaches* of the grounded theory as and where relevant.<sup>11</sup>

In determining the modes, motivations and meaning of Kui conversion, it is the oral narrative collected from the converts themselves, which is most valuable. The source of Christian knowledge, the level of exposure to Christianity, the motivating factors, and the decision process in conversion needs to be provided by the converts. With the Kui this information still remains as oral history among the people, though some other tribal converts have produced writings and accounts of their conversion history. Theories and explanations of conversion formulated and produced without accessing this evidence from the agents and participants of conversion remain inadequate and unsatisfactory. The Kui converts are the focus group of my interviews, for it is their witness, their voice, which informs and guides my conclusions.

Having decided the topic of research and selected the interview participants and the location, I then undertook fieldwork: interviews, observations, conversations, listening to stories, and documenting the findings. My interview questions were semi-structured, allowing the flow of narrative in the conversation to be interrupted as little as possible. But interview sessions were steered in order to stay on track of the research topic.<sup>12</sup> I shall return to details of that later in this chapter.

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<sup>9</sup> Strauss, Anselm and Corbin, Juliet. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. London: Sage Publications, 1998, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> As Ian Dey quotes from Benoliel's survey, reviewing the abstracts of articles for the period 1990-1994, only 33 could be interpreted as grounded theory research while others were described as using a grounded theory *approach* (emphasis mine) which "made use of interview data only." Ian Dey. *Grounding Grounded Theory*, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Practical guidelines on conducting the interview in Donald A Ritchie's *Doing Oral History* (New Delhi: Prentice Hall International, 1995), its chapter "Conducting the Interview" in particular has been quite useful.

## 2. The Converts Oral Narrative: Why Are They Important?

Kui society is primarily oral. Important experiences and events of life that matter to them are kept in memory. The oldest member of a family or social unit is considered the most experienced and the repository of the common past. The Kui converts to Christianity are the primary witnesses of their conversion and common Christian heritage and tradition which they recount from memory. Any adequate understanding of the Kui religious change, sociological, missiological or any other, must include as its source the oral witnesses of the converts, which is nevertheless ignored in most studies claiming to know the *raison d'être* of such conversions. Therefore, access to oral data is necessary and a prerequisite for understanding and interpreting these conversions. Paul Thompson argues,

Life-history sociologists have discovered that oral history interviews not only could bring more nuggets of information, but wholly new perspectives, evidence and also interpretations from formerly ill represented stand points of ordinary men, women and children and about what *they* believed had mattered most in *their* lives.<sup>13</sup>

The Kui Christians should be allowed to speak for themselves and give 'testimony' to their conversion with their reasons for accepting the Gospel message as relevant to them. Inclusion of the voice of the converts--the performers in the act of conversion is necessary for a valid understanding of this action. Ignoring those who are the subjects of this history by intellectual prejudice in categorising them as inarticulate, unsophisticated or incapable of making informed judgement in and about their conversion is inadequate and fallacious.

## 3. Oral Narrative Data: How Reliable Are They?

In Qualitative Research, narrative analysis is 'hearing' data derived from the actors or participants themselves. It seeks to reflect reality as experienced by those actors. But can we trust the oral evidence produced from memory? How reliable is it? The question poses a false choice, asserts Paul Thompson, author of *Oral History*, because written historical sources are not necessarily an objective and reliable fact either.<sup>14</sup> For "all historical sources are suffused by subjectivity right from the start...Oral sources can indeed convey 'reliable' information, but to treat them as

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<sup>13</sup> Thompson, Paul. "Life Histories and the Analysis of Social Change" in Daniel Bertaux (Ed). *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences*. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1981. p. 290.

<sup>14</sup> Thompson, Paul. *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*. Third Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 118.

'simply one more document' is to ignore the special value which they have for subjective, spoken testimony."<sup>15</sup>

The past experience and the event of conversion are also continuous and linked to the present through the living memory of the Kui Christians. The personal narratives of conversion are a mapping of a 'consequential event' in their life's journey that is ongoing and a lived-experience of the past that is continuous with the present. In Thompson's words, "Our lives are cumulations of our own past, continuous and indivisible. And it would be purely fanciful to suggest that typical life-story could be largely invented."<sup>16</sup> Personal narrative, says Riessman, is "embodying the self in stories" and "The narrative analysis approach gives prominence to human agency and imagination. And it is well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity."<sup>17</sup> Vansina, arguing for oral history as evidence, says, "testimony in its widest sense is 'evidence about something'."<sup>18</sup> Collection of oral narrative from the converts provides the opportunity to explore and record the views of the subjects of that very history who have been overlooked in most studies being considered as historically inarticulate. Oral historian Allan Nevis believes oral accounts or testimonies are 'gateways to history' and a systematic attempt to obtain data from the lips and living memories of the performers, in our case the converts.<sup>19</sup>

#### D. Researcher As Participant-Observer-Listener

Being an Oriya I am the closest neighbour and, if not an insider, not a stranger either. Most Kui Christians are bilingual except for those who live in the most inaccessible remote villages. Oriya language and culture determines the political boundary of Orissa, as Indian states are linguistically divided. Orissa state has been the heartland of the Kui people since antiquity and they live under the shadow of the dominant Oriya cultural and religious milieu and firmly entrenched in its political history. However, they have maintained their Kui identity, religion and culture at the same time. Recently they have become more assertive in their Kui identity and on their demand Phulbani district, the Kui heartland, was renamed as Kondhmal in 1997.

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<sup>15</sup> Thompson, Paul. *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, p. 118.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>17</sup> Riessman, C Kohler. *Narrative Analysis*. Qualitative Research Method Series, 30, London: Sage Publications, p. 3-5.

<sup>18</sup> Vansina, Jan, *Oral Tradition as History*, London: James Curry, 1985, p. 27.

<sup>19</sup> Dunaway, David K and Baum Willa K. *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*. Second Edition. Altamira. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996, p. 29.

But at the same time the influence of Oriya is also on the increase. In affairs of education, business, government, law and in almost anything else to do with the wider society, Oriya is the *lingua franca*. The expansion of modern communication, education and information networks into some interior and hinterlands of Kui habitation have resulted in Oriya culture becoming an increasing influence on its population. Sources of news and information and the popular culture and mass entertainment are all in Oriya. Apart from the missionary efforts of translating and printing the Bible (the NT) in Kui, composing Kui hymnbook, catechism and the likes, Kui language remains unwritten outside the Church and Oriya is the literary means in education and mass media and business. My fieldwork among the people involved sharing some common identity.

At another level there is a common Christian identity and stronger bond. Contact and relationship between the Kui Christians of the hills and the Oriya Christians of the plains goes back to the days of rehabilitation of Meria victims in the early 1800s. Christian Kui boys and girls and adults have long been coming to Cuttack, Berhampur and other nearby towns for higher education and jobs. A majority of Kui pastors have been trained for basic theological education at the Cuttack Theological School. There is slow but increasing integration with many Kui having found jobs, married into Oriya families and settled down in the plains. Since 1970, with the formation of the Church of North India (CNI), Kui churches along with other Baptist churches of the BMS Mission were formed into a single Cuttack Diocese (with exception of those which stayed away from the Church Union). Two Oriya Bishops and a few Oriya pastors and presbyters ministered in the Kui churches until the Kui churches were formed into the separate Phulbani Diocese in 1995 and a Kui Bishop elected in 1999. Similarly also a number of trained and able Kui pastors have been appointed in Oriya Churches and still continue to serve.

At a personal level, I shared accommodation during my college days in Cuttack with Kui youths--for two years in one instance and two and half years in another. In my 15 years as a seminary teacher, I taught a number of Kui students. Through a marriage in my extended family in 1984, I now have a Kui relative in the village of Mallikapodi, whom I see during visits to Udaygiri. Being a fellow Christian, Oriya, and an ordained minister belonging to the Diocese of Cuttack and a seminary lecturer to few Kui students, I had little difficulty in establishing rapport and gaining needed confidence to ask questions on such a personal subject as one's conversion.

Having as my guide and companion a former student of mine who is the Area Superintendent of Baliguda in the Diocese also made my access easy. Relationship was established by accepting hospitality and exchanging views on topics of interest to my hosts. Empathy or socialisation with the researched need not necessarily compromise or jeopardise research objectivity<sup>20</sup>, contrary to Sogaard's views about media researchers in *Research in Church and Mission*.<sup>21</sup> His list of "Fundamentals of Personal Interviewing" seems a mechanical approach to what should be a dynamic process of interviewing for qualitative data collection. For example Sogaard says, "Go only to the house you have been assigned...Do everything you can to complete the interview once you have found someone home...Remember your role is to uncover opinion and not to change it...Ask the questions only as they are worded...Ask every question, no matter how sensitive it appears to be."<sup>22</sup> Qualitative research through personal and focused group interviewing is rather a dynamic process where both the researcher and the researched are active agents and the researcher is not a passive recipient of cold data or dead history. This is engagement with the researched in real time and space and interacting passionately. Koepping therefore argues that,

It is only through the negotiated intersubjectivity of reflected-upon dialogue, which does not mean just agreeing and being dispassionately nice but also passionately arguing and jointly searching and being searched, only through meticulous examination of the tension and emotion in researcher as well as the researched that we can creep towards objectivity.<sup>23</sup>

Koepping's 'negotiated intersubjectivity' is a valid point, more particularly, in a subject area like conversion and exploring the factors influencing the same. No researcher can approach his/her focused group or the topic with "pure objectivity" free of assumptions. The issues of one's religious location, background, frame of reference and, in India today, even one's political orientation, affect the understanding of the issues relating to tribal conversions.

I was among the Kui as a Christian and seminary teacher visiting fellow Christians. There was a risk of their being nice and polite, and trying to appear spiritual. However with time, and repeating some visits, familiarity and friendship

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<sup>20</sup> See Johnson, John. *Doing Field Research*. London: Collier Macmillan, 1975. See especially chapters 1-5.

<sup>21</sup> Sogaard, Viggo. *Research in Church and Mission*, California: William Carey Press, 1996.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>23</sup> Koepping, Elizabeth. "Our Life is Work and The Church" in Gotffmann, Anne and Ritschel, Ute (Ed). *Kulturanthropologinnen im Dialog*, Koenigstein: Helmer, 1997.



was created with some, leading to deeper layers of conversation. But one who is not a Christian—a researcher or government official in a position of power and authority—he/she would normally be viewed with suspicion, and in some cases may be considered a danger who might be expected to want to know matters of a political nature. Even among missionaries, those who were patronising, rigid and strict in enforcing dogmatic Baptist Christianity, viewing many of the Kui practices such as drinking, smoking, wearing of charms, beating of ritual drums, dancing etc. as non-Christian, sin or superstition, would find it hard to access Kui thoughts or any issue.

The Kui and Oriya Christians, notwithstanding the latter's assumed superiority, share a common faith and find themselves in a situation of one religious minority within an assertive Hindu majority society. This common minority status and a sense of solidarity are vital to sharing, openness and exchange of information. Opinions about the Church situation, leadership, organisation, moral and ethical issues facing the Christians of Orissa today were expressed without much inhibition. During visits and interview sessions we shared similar experiences in terms of living out and practising our Christian faith in the present context. I listened to how it was for the first converts in those days of conversion, trying to understand how Christianity reached them and why they were drawn towards it. The people were free in their relationship to me to speak about the Lord (*Prabhu*), the Gospel and its relevance in situations of Kui religious predicaments. Some clearly spoke from their hearts and more often than not we found ourselves in animated conversations on topics that concerned us both. They had little inhibition in talking to me on the subject of which I was primarily interested. Information about how they came to believe the message and became Christian and why they converted was often shared at length and frankly.

I did face certain limitations in my approach to the people and access to information. I entered the Kui world from outside its geography, mother tongue, culture and history. As one from the plains, Oriya and a visitor, a cultural barrier existed when approaching people in remote villages. A natural gender limitation restricted access to information from women folk. However, I did interview three women who responded to my satisfaction to questions I asked them. Kondh women are expected to work hard and they do almost every thing that men do except ploughing. The segregation between men and women is much less among the Kondh than their counter part Oriya women. It was my own cultural inhibition that restricted me from asking to interview a woman when reaching a village new to me. Finally the



time was also a limiting factor. I had no chance of a second round of talk with some people but was to be satisfied with free and uninterrupted conversations allowing the person to unwrap as much as he/she could. I tried to cover a larger number of people in more villages for a wider sample of interview data and if a pattern or trend in the process of the conversion movement could be established.

## E. Steps Involved in the Interview Process

### 1. Individual Interviews and Personal Narrative Data

There is little published and easily accessible literature on the Kui Christians, in contrast to ethnographic, anthropological and historical publications available on the Kui tribal people as a whole. Few ethnic Kui tribal people and still fewer Kui Christians (Protestant) have produced written materials. Therefore the account of Kui encounter with Christianity and the conversions are primarily oral testimony. So interviews were to be conducted to collect their story and the sources and contents of the Christian message. Tape-recorded individual interviews were conducted with a select number of Kui Christians to obtain the qualitative data of oral testimonies. Outside formal recording of interviews I have also engaged in impromptu discussions and casual conversations with ordinary Christians and some leaders found interested to talk on the topic or even in general about the Mission, the Church or Kui Christians. In the interview process, any abstract or academic terms or phrases had to be simplified or substituted with more concrete terms or para-phrased. Instead of the question "What role has the Christian message played in your conversion?" I was forced to break up the question into several smaller questions such as--"Who told you about the Christians? From where did you first hear about them? What did he/she or they tell you about Christian religion? What was attractive to you in this religion? Why you wanted to become a Christian? Is Christianity any better than your old religion?"

### 2. Selection and Description of Participants

Selected individual interviews focusing on first-generation converts were conducted in Ghumsur-Udaygiri (henceforth G Udaygiri), Baliguda and Daringbadi--the three main Areas of the CNI Diocese organised into Areas and Pastorates. I conducted 40 such interviews in 15 different villages in the Phulbani (Kondhmal) Diocese of the Church of North India, Orissa, between April and July, 2001. Besides

conducting interview sessions, I entered into conversations and informal discussions with other Kui Christian leaders of the Church and of the villages. Data obtained through personal interviews are variously termed by sociologists as personal narrative, narrative, story, biography, self-report, oral history, oral source, ethno-history, life-history, life-account, first-person account and spoken testimony.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, persons responding to interview questions are also differently described as interviewees, participants, research participants, respondents, informants, focus groups and so on. These terms have been mentioned interchangeably in my description of the same in this and following chapters.

The major criterion for selecting participants was that they should be first generation converts, who practised or were part of the tribal religion which they have intentionally left to become Christians. A former student who became my field companion guided in selecting or locating people to interview. He originally came from the area, and as the Area Superintendent of Baliguda Pastorate Union, he frequently travels to churches and Pastorates within the area and is known by many people personally. In addition to locating and selecting participants, he also helped in interpreting when it was needed in two interview sessions. There may have been some reticence on those three interviewee's part to speak openly in his presence, but this was inevitable.

The selected interview participants were all Kui speaking Kondhs and Pans, mostly male. Three were women who also volunteered to participate and so were interviewed. All could speak Oriya fluently except three individuals whom my guide assisted by interpreting both ways. All were over 35 years of age, most were elderly persons who became Christians as adults between the late 1950s and 1970s. Three interviews were given by the sons of deceased. Each son spoke about his fathers' conversion, relating what they had seen and heard from him. There was a general reticence and shyness among the women to speak when other men were around. However Kondh women, married and single, generally enjoy more freedom and equality with men than their counterparts among the Hindu Oriya women.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Bertaux, Daniel(Ed). *Biography and Society: The Life-History approach in Social Sciences*. California: Sage Publications, 1981.

<sup>25</sup> Dhall, M. *British Rule*, p. 82.

### 3. Framing of Interview Questions

Robert Burgess emphasises the need for totally unstructured interviews without any pre-formulated questions, discarding the conventional method of structured interviews in which “questions are formulated *before* the interview to be ‘answered’ rather than considered, rephrased, re-oriented, discussed and analysed.”<sup>26</sup> Following him, Rubin and Rubin describe it as ‘guided conversation’.<sup>27</sup> Other, more conventional authors place emphasis on structured interviews in their standard research methodology textbooks.<sup>28</sup> I chose a middle path: on the one hand, I had my core questions for which I *needed* answers from the research participants, on the other, I also realised from preliminary conversations that a tightly structured, interrogative style of interview would not be suitable for obtaining stories of conversion which were better described by spontaneous self-narratives.

My core questions were 1. How did you come to know about the Christian religion? 2. Through whom or what? 3. Why did you decide to become a Christian? 4. Describe what you were practising in the Kui religion and why you left it? 5. What do you like about your Christian faith? 6. What changes and difficulties have you experienced since becoming a Christian? 7. Did you tell others that you are now a Christian and ask them to become also? These questions were guided into interview-conversation session. Emotion, excitement and concerns were allowed to be expressed uninterrupted when relating to some incidents that were interesting or important or hard for them.

### 4. Interview Sessions

Normally the interview sessions were not arranged before hand. When I arrived in a village, I met people or waited for them to arrive or went to them as needed, with my guide accompanying me. In most cases the interview session was preceded by, and ended with, wider subjects of human interest and life issues on the hills. Though I was aware of the persecutions of Christians in the recent past, due to its sensitive nature I had to show caution and suppress my own inquisitiveness about the details. However, a number of my informants recounted their own experiences of persecution as a consequence of their own conversion in the past.

<sup>26</sup> Burgess, Robert G. *In the Field: An Introduction to Field Research*, London: Routledge. Reprint. 1997, p. 101.

<sup>27</sup> Rubin, Herbert and Rubin, Ircnc. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. London: Sage Publication, 1995, p.7.

<sup>28</sup> Goode, W J and Hatt, P K, *Methods in Social Research*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952 and Moser, C and Kalton, G. *Survey Methods in Social Investigation*, London: Heinemann, 1971.

The sessions were not strictly individual as groups of people were always present nearby or squatting, listening and occasionally prompting and actually participating. The presence of others, whether family, relative or friends in a sense authenticated the facts and information shared by the interviewee. There was a keenness among the others to join in the 'conversation' (interview), so they sat around the interviewee commenting or correcting what was said as and when they felt it necessary to do so. The group shared in the individual interviews: in the Kui context any other mode would have been impossible.

## 5. Recording and Transcription

Interviews were recorded with an audio tape recorder and written notes were made of the impromptu discussions. Due to mechanical difficulty with the recorder, some interviews had to be noted down by hand. The preliminaries—greetings, self-presentation, introductions and warming up questions—were not included in recordings. After getting on to the topic of my enquiry I explained that I want to record/write down what they were saying so could he/she please repeat again. Once on record I would guide the conversation with my questions. The recorded materials which are in Oriya have been translated into English.

## 6. Informal Consultations

The Kui church leaders are well placed to understand their own people and articulate the peoples' struggles, interests, aspirations, hopes and fears. These leaders express in intellectual terms interest in Christianity and disenchantment with the old practices and beliefs. I have had meetings, chats and conversations with some of these leaders. They are or were mostly evangelists, pastors, teachers, administrators or trained medical workers. They include some diocese leaders and workers (CNI) and leaders of the independent Baptist Church of the erstwhile Kondh Hills District Churches Union (KHDCU) of the BMS mission. The new Bishop of the new Phulbani (Kondhmal) Diocese, the three Area Superintendents of the three Pastorate Unions and a few Independent Baptist Church leaders.

The aim was to keep my ears open to a wider group and to listen to their story of the Church, the coming of Christianity to their community, their perception of the work of the Mission, what Christian message they heard in the words and the works of the Mission and Church, and how Christianity compared and contrasted with the former religion. I did catch up with a few leaders in church services, at a wedding

and at special meetings, and impromptu talk with them proved to be an opportunity to gain frank personal opinions, some feelings of nostalgia about the Mission's past and some missionaries, some suggestions, and also some grievances coming from deep within. Though hesitant (and some embarrassed) to be recorded, they were quite keen that I listen to them or rather lend an ear to their passionate talk. Wrapped in the talk was vital information of the past and present state of affairs and the future trend of the community and the Church.

## Conclusion

The research focuses on the major communication forms in the Mission to the Kui people examining the role, the functions and the impact and how they affected conversions. It identifies five major areas of Mission involvement that were responsible in diffusing the Christian message. These key areas of Christian impact need to be scrutinised for an assessment of the Mission work of evangelisation and the impact of its message on the people.

This thesis assumes and emphasises that people concerned could not be taken as mere passive recipients of the claims and promises of Christianity but rather were active negotiators who engaged with Christianity in their own terms and time. Their testimony to conversion is an important and indispensable primary source. This source which remains as oral history needs to be accessed and consulted in any interpretation of the conversion among them. The approach of the Grounded Theory of qualitative research and oral data collection has guided my interview data collection and interpretation. This theory emphasises data from the 'ground' as the valid source and the categories or themes arising from this data to determine or lead to the formulation of theory, or in our case, to the interpretations or conclusions of the thesis.

A theoretical framework of Christian communication in Mission, the principles and theories of communication in cross-cultural mission will guide the observations and assessment. The means adopted by the Baptist Mission and the indigenous means and practices of the Kui people in communication within the community will be studied in this light. From this methodological foundation I shall now proceed to examine the five modes of communication of the mission.



## Chapter Two

### The Person as the Message: Personal Impact

#### Introduction

In the Kui people's encounter with Christianity the persons come first. But contrary to the common view, the first persons were not the missionaries but the East India Company officers. These administrators professed a Christian faith and viewed the Kondh tribal practice of human sacrifice, called Meria, and female infanticide, not only as 'irrational', 'savage' and 'criminal' but also as a 'sin against humanity and God' and accordingly saw their own task of its abolition as a 'sacred mission' and 'an imperative duty to God and mankind'.<sup>1</sup> They campaigned hard against the practices, rescued and rehabilitated the victims, and introduced schools and other 'civilizing' initiatives in which they demonstrated their social Christian persona parallel to their military identity. They themselves were no preachers of Christianity but represented and demonstrated it in thought and actions.

The encounter with the missionary was next. In the early years they undertook visits, trekking, camping and making contact with people, the mission base being in the plains at the bottom of the hills. The Kui people who came in closest contact with the missionary were those working as coolies, camp attendants, interpreters and other helpers while the missionary moved on horse, with tent and gadgets; a scene no different from the ruling Sahibs except that the missionary spoke peace and preached the gospel. The bridge between the missionary message and Kui thought was built by two Indians, one a Hindu the other a Christian, both of Telugu background to which the Kui were closer in language and ancient links. The earlier missionaries were strong in their zeal almost to the point of being martyrs. However, they were not especially appreciative of the culture they had entered. The younger generation (post-World War I) showed change and learned to work alongside their Kui colleagues.

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<sup>1</sup> Two of the prominent ones among them, who also have produced their accounts of service and campaign against Meria, are Major John Campbell and Major Samuel C Macpherson. See Campbell, John Sir. *A Personal Narrative of Thirteen Years Service Amongst the Wild Tribes of Khondistan for the Suppression of Human Sacrifice*. London: Hurst and Blackett, 1864, and Macpherson, William. *Memorials of Service in India from the Correspondence of the late Major Samuel Charters Macpherson, C.B. Political Agent At Gwalior During the Mutiny and Formerly Employed in the Suppression of Human Sacrifice in Orissa*. London: J. Murray, 1865.



The persons who communicated and evangelised in terms of disseminating the message, resulting in conversions and leading to the conversion movement, were the Kui converts—as evangelists, pastors, school teachers or enthusiastic lay workers—through sharing their story of new faith and perhaps more through their changed status and life-style. The Pans in particular, who had been traditionally community messengers or the go-between the reticent Kondh and the outside world, smoothly fitted into their new role as Christian evangelists or bearers of the Gospel. Even the British EIC officers and the missionaries achieved their results by the help, cooperation and involvement of the Kui people.

The person of the EIC officer or later the missionary and the Kui evangelists were the medium and also the message, the purveyor of the new ideas and information. As media prophet Marshall McLuhan asserted, all media are extensions of the (hu)man and the ‘medium *is* the message’.<sup>2</sup> In the context of mission and the missionary, Koepping asserts, “if the ‘medium is the message’...then the flesh *bringing* the Word needs attention as well as the Word itself” for “messages are inevitably coloured if not tainted by the messengers.”<sup>3</sup> The persons as the image of their message communicated and also contradicted it, sometimes portraying conflicting personas. The Officers were soldiers *and* social Christians, the missionaries were Christians *and* Sahibs (in the sense of masters) and the Kui evangelists were also masters. In the positive personal mode, the person as the message involved relationship and human touch; yet the message could equally contain insensitivity and prejudging to such an extent that the intended message of equality, equity and love were negated. Precisely because personal interaction was intimate, its effects were that much more intense than is the case with the other communication modes.

My aim in this chapter is to look at these persons, examining them as the carrier and the image of the gospel they represented and communicated. I examine the three groups of persons, the EIC officers, western missionaries and the Kui message-bearers, and see how and what the persons communicated, as catalysts and as the message themselves, and what the implications were for conversion.

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<sup>2</sup> McLuhan, M. *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*. London: Ark Edition, 1987.

<sup>3</sup> Koepping, E. “Spiritual Representation, Priests, and the Borneo Villager” *Studies in World Christianity*, Edinburgh, 2002, pp. 1-3.

## A. The Context and Immediate Background to Kui-British Encounter

The British and the Kui came face to face in 1835 when the former arrived to annex the Ghumusur kingdom when the Raja (king), Dhananjay Bhanja, failed to pay the exorbitant tribute money being demanded by the Company. Raja Dhananjay along with his *Ranis* (queens) and attendants fled to the Kondhs in the hills who were known warriors and also regarded the Bhanjas as their Raja. Dhananjay died soon, though the Kondhs engaged the British troops in guerrilla warfare for nearly two years. Fighting for a Raja, who did not actually have absolute suzerainty over the Kondhs, shows a character of fierce loyalty of the Kondhs. When they could, they also killed off a few in the British army, European and Indian included. This was the background and the first encounter of the hills tribe with the British. To the British it was also the occasion when,

The astounding discovery was then made that we include among our fellow subjects a whole people who practiced human sacrifice and female infanticide on a scale and with a cruelty which had never been surpassed by the most savage of nations...<sup>4</sup>

George Edward Russell of the Madras Board of Revenue led the British army in the war in Ghumusur and Boud.<sup>5</sup> The British not only had to face Kondh resistance but the difficult jungle terrain of the hills and the deadly malaria. The war dragged on for two years while victims of Meria were also removed from Kondh houses. After the war, John Campbell, assistant to Russell, took charge of the campaign against Meria and rescued many more victims. Samuel Macpherson succeeded him in 1841 and carried on until 1847. He was made the Meria Agent and Ghumusur was made a special Meria Agency, whose administration came directly under the Agent. Campbell returned in 1847 and continued until 1854, when he retired to Edinburgh. Captain J P Frye and Major MacVicar, among others who had assisted the former two, took charge after them.<sup>6</sup> In 1861 the Meria Agency was

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<sup>4</sup> Dalton, E.T. *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*. Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government printing, 1872, p. 285.

<sup>5</sup> Orissa under the British was eventually administered by all the three British Provinces: "Ghumusur, Chinna Khemedi, Pedda Khemedi and Sorada in the Ganjam Agency, and Jeypore in the Vizagapatnam Agency were in Madras; Boad and Maji Deso under the Cuttack Commissioner, and Patna, Karcall and Nowgedda in the South West Frontier Agency were under the Bengal Government; while Kalahandi and Bastar were administered by the Commissioner at Nagpur, under the Bombay Government." Padel F. *The Sacrifice of Human Being*, p. 103. The Kuis were scattered in all the three areas but more concentrated in areas under the Madras Presidency.

<sup>6</sup> Among the host of other officers who assisted Campbell and Macpherson and at times took charge themselves to tour and campaign were Messrs Stevenson, Bannerman, Mills, Lt. Hill, Lt. Hicks, Asst

abolished, declaring the area Meria free, thus ending the campaign. The administration of the hills was mostly left in the hands of a few Indian officers. The British administration introduced development measures with roads, weekly markets and increase of trade contact with the plains Oriya: schools were started for the first time in the hills. The aim was to begin a process of tribal integration with plains culture. The Kui were recruited to the police force as *Sebundis*, and there was a turn around in the Kui attitude to the British.<sup>7</sup>

The British administration and tribal change in Orissa have been studied from the usual historical and anthropological criticism of the colonial rule.<sup>8</sup> Studies on British tribal policy generally dwell on the armed measures against Meria, the Kondh resistance or the subsequent British measures for tribal acculturation.<sup>9</sup> In one such recent study Felix Padel has dealt with the subject most thoroughly focusing on the British violence and criticising the British claim justifying interference with Kondh human sacrifice and female infanticide.<sup>10</sup> While Padel's criticism of the colonial violence is right, he has not paid attention to the dimension of a dynamic ideological interaction between the Kondh and the British, each influencing and impacting on the other. From another perspective this period was epoch making; setting new trends and modernizing (for better and for worse), ending the age-old but gruesome ritual murder and liberating both the victims and the practitioners from the dictates of the bondage of a bloody custom for which today's Kui are grateful and certainly the Kui Christians. What did the Kondh perceive about the British and the change they caused in Kui history? This needs to be examined. But first a brief introduction to Meria, the practice at the core of Kondh belief and ritual, which was questioned,

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Surgeon Cadenhead, Captain Dunlop, Lt. Haughton, Brigadier-General Dyce, Captain MacDonald, Captain McNeill and Lt. Crauford.

<sup>7</sup> Historian D Behera records a turn around in relationship and attitude by the Kondh as early as 1857 and termed it as 'The Grand Reconciliation'. In his reading of the history, "Quite contrary to the erstwhile national character and traits of the Khonds, they suddenly turned more loyal to the British authorities in 1857. The Sebundis of Ghumsur Maliahs "behaved remarkably well" wherever they were posted. This led Cockburn, Commissioner of Orissa, to write immediately to Lt. McNeill, the agent of the Maliah Hill Tracts, to raise immediately "a levy of Ghumsur men"...to be deployed at Sambalpur." Behera, D. *The Bhanjas and the Khonds of Orissa*. Cuttack: Punthi Pustak, 1987, p.126.

<sup>8</sup> Mojumdar, K. *Changing Tribal Life in British Orissa*. New Delhi: Kavery Books, 1998 (see chapter 3 and 4 "The Kandhs of Ganjam, 1836-186: British Impact on a Tribal Society and Ganjam Agency, 1839-1900: The Problem of Tribal Administration, pp. 18-30 and 31-44); Patnaik, N R. *The History and Culture of Khond Tribes*. New Delhi: Commonwealth Publications, 1992 and Mukherjee, P. *History of Orissa in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*. Bhubaneswar: Utkal University Press, 1964.

<sup>9</sup> See Padel, Felix. *The Sacrifice of Human Being: British Rule and Konds of Orissa*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995 and Mojumdar, K. *Changing tribal Life in British Orissa*. Delhi: Kavery Books, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Padel, Felix. *The Sacrifice of Human Being*.

contested, suppressed and underwent change through Christian moral understanding and influence.

## B. The Meria Sacrifice of the Kondh<sup>11</sup>

The Meria or the sacrifice of human being by the Kondhs was the supreme blood sacrifice among the many sacrifices they performed, from chicken to buffalo. The Meria was sacrificed to the Earth Goddess called Dharni Penu. *Dharni* meaning earth and *Penu* means god or deity. She was also called Tari Penu in some places and demanded human sacrifice. Dharni is worshipped along with Bura penu, the Sky god and Jakery Penu, the great ancestor god.<sup>12</sup> The human sacrifice was for the wellbeing of the cosmos: the fertility of the earth, good rain, health and more popularly it was to ensure a good colour for turmeric, their main cash crop.

The sacrificial victim or Meria was bought for a price and the Pans (in some areas called Doms) were customarily obliged to supply the victims. They normally kidnapped children from distant places or occasionally bought them from impoverished parents. The Meria could be male or female, child or adult, sometimes long resident in their owner's house for years. Not all were sacrificed, some being brought up as labourers and working in the fields. At sacrifice the Kondhs disclaimed any responsibility or guilt for taking the life, saying they had paid the proper price and so were free of any guilt of murder.

The actual performance varied in detail from place to place but normally the ritual included the victim being anointed with oil and turmeric, made drunk with palm liquor or fed with opium, processed through the village or dragged to the site where he/she would be tied to a sacrificial pole. Then the Jaani would begin the sacrificial ritual with invocations, normally accompanied by cheering, songs and dances. The Jaani then would strike first with his knife followed by crowds of people stripping pieces of flesh and then hurrying to their fields to bury it in a corner. The head and intestine were avoided, being burnt along with the skeleton. When Meria

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<sup>11</sup> Macpherson first wrote and published on Kondh religion in *An Account of the Religion of the Khonds in Orissa*. London, 1852. Barbara Boal's study of Meria is most thorough and published as major subject in two books, *The Konds: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*. Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1982 and *Man, the Gods and the Search for Cosmic Wellbeing: One Hundred and Fifty Years of Kondh Rites, 1835-1992*. Bhubaneswar: NISWAS, 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Other main deities included Loha penu, god of war, Dond/Soro penu, god of hill, Pitterri penu, god of increase, Pidju penu, god of rain, Sundi penu, god of boundaries, Boobry penu, goddess of new vegetation/fruit, Klamo penu, god of hunting, Naju penu, the village god (also Dharni or Jakery), Idu penu, god of each household, Pideri Pita, the ancestor spirit and others. See Boal, B. *Man, The Gods and the Search for Cosmic Wellbeing*.

was banned completely the Kondhs resorted to sacrificing monkeys and buffalo as a practical substitute. The office of the great priest Jaani gradually became defunct but the second rung called the *Kutagatanju* or *Kutagataka* (for women) continues.

The British saw it as an extreme barbaric act, a most heinous way of putting a fellow human to death and a folly to suppose any good could outcome from 'so sinful an act'. But Kondhs viewed it as essential to their existence, ordained by *Dharni Penu*, core to their faith and necessary for keeping the proper relationship with the seen and unseen forces governing them. The practice was not secret and involved the whole village or many villages and was not only for the brave few fanatics. The personal conceptions of the British and the Kondh about Meria were complete opposite to each other and the process of its abolition involved intense dialogue and reasoning, besides force, lasting over two decades.

### C. The EIC Persons and the Mission against Meria

The British EIC officers represented western Christian thoughts and acted from such a conviction. Campbell's accounts of his negotiations show Christian rationalisation and reasoning when engaging with the Kui in negotiation. Arguing against Meria, he claims "I invariably called on them to reply whether my argument was true or false, fair or unfair. And their general answer was, 'Yes, it is true.'"<sup>13</sup> Macpherson was more prone to use force, though neither showed any tolerance to Meria. Campbell was skilful in persuading the Kondhs, allowing time and bringing them together to a council for discussion and reflection over the practice with possible comparisons and contrasts from neighbouring people and even illustrations from his own historical background. The Kui elders' council was an important part of Kui social structure where issues are discussed and decisions are made. The council normally met at the place called *kudi*, the divine residence of the earth goddess, called by the Pan messenger who went to each house and gave (orally) the agenda at the door of the house. The council discussed matters of the village as one family (*kutumbo gonka*) and took decisions that were binding on all.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Campbell, John Sir. *A Personal Narrative of Thirteen Years Service Amongst the Wild Tribes of Khondistan for the Suppression of Human Sacrifice*. London: Hurst and Blackett, 1864, p. 128.

<sup>14</sup> Nayak, P K. *Blood, Women and Territory: An Analysis of Clan Feuds of Dongria Konds*. New Delhi: Reliance Publishing, 1989, pp. 172-180.



1. John Campbell: Persuasion and Negotiation

John Campbell generally took an approach of conciliation and negotiated decision over the issue. He personally toured "districts...more gloomy, pestilential regions,...the Kondhs of Domasingi refused to surrender their Merias at first: long and tedious councils were held...and troops were ordered several times to surround them but eventually Merias were given up without a fight."<sup>15</sup> His negotiation with a council of 3000 Kondh headmen in Ghumusur is significant, showed him a persuasive and skilful communicator. Campbell gives much detail of a particular council he held with the Kondhs in Ghumusur where an accord was reached with the participating Kondhs. They deliberated and decided to give up Meria, promising to abstain from future sacrifice under solemn oath. The Ghumusur success set a precedent for other councils. Campbell's detailed account of negotiation in this council shows how decisions were reached involving Kondh elders and their people who were persuaded to reason and explore change or alternatives to the practice. Below I have selectively quoted the fine points of the communication process between Campbell and the Kui elders. The sentences in the right hand column are quotations, and in the left hand are my comments in italics.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <i>Anticipation:</i>                     | I need not say with what anxiety I anticipated this first meeting...on the all important topic of the suppression of the ceremony so dearly cherished, so deeply venerated...  |
| <i>Setting/ambience</i>                  | I took my place under the shade of a tree and the chiefs around me...their followers at a distance in groups, sitting or standing.   |
| <i>Warm up</i>                           | I received them in manner that I knew would be gratifying acceptance to them   |
| <i>Statement of purpose, Translation</i> | I made them a lengthened address through one of the interpreters   |
| <i>Reasoning:</i>                        | <div><div>1. The Government is deeply anguished to know the prevalence of this sacrifice and...doesn't tolerate this revolting ceremony</div><div>2. This 'savage and impious' practice must stop. A new era has dawned.</div><div>3. I hope you do not desire to remain forever in darkness and allow all other tribes outstrip you in the race of intelligence and civilisation.</div></div> |

<sup>15</sup> Padel, Felix. *Sacrifice of Human Beings*...p. 97.



4. You are no longer the subjects of an ignorant rajah who took no interest in your welfare.
5. The British government is paternal...regards all subjects as its children--no distinction between Khond and Ooryah (Oriya)...But if the life of one is taken by sacrifice or otherwise then another life be required in punishment.
6. Is it not their own rule--head for head, life for life...?
7. Were these sacrifices really necessary? This I considered a most vital and important point and I pressed it upon their consideration.
8. I entreated that I was not there to interfere with their religion, did not come among them to subvert their faith, but exclusively to prohibit a custom unsanctioned by the law of God or man.

### *Illustration*

9. I thought it better to confess that we like them had once sacrificed human beings...indulged in similar cruel offerings, believed that god's judgement could be averted by bloody expiations...But those were days of gross ignorance...But we have emerged from this darkness gradually and consequently all kinds of prosperity have come upon us since we abolished those sinful rites. We now possess learning and wisdom...I told them they must think of this.
10. Putting aside ourselves, I continued, of whom they could not be expected to know much, I asked them to look at their neighbours on the plains. They don't sacrifice human beings ...were not their crops as good and abundant...were not their cattle better...were they not as well off as any hill tribe?

### *Entreating*

I earnestly begged them to trust in my friendship...

### *Authority*

I reminded them that as the representative of the British government I was empowered to speak with authority. If complied peacefully with what was now required promised to grant every favour in our power to grant.

### *Impression*

I used every argument calculated to make an impression on such minds...

### *Reflection*

I requested them that they would discuss the subject among themselves and then communicate to me...<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Campbell, Major John. *A Personal Narrative...*, pp. 69-72.

Campbell says, they listened patiently and calmly. Then they broke up and reassembled after private consultations among themselves. Five or six of the oldest and most influential of Kondh chiefs came forward to express the sentiment of the majority of the council.

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <i>Kondh defence</i>              | We have always sacrificed human beings. Our fathers handed down the custom to us. They thought no wrong, nor did we; on the contrary, we felt we were doing what was right.                                |
| <i>Alternative</i>                | We were then the subjects of Rajah of Ghumusur, now we are the subjects of the great Government, whose orders we must obey.  |
| <i>Disclaimer/<br/>Compromise</i> | If the earth refuses its produce, or diseases destroy us, it is not our fault; we will abandon the sacrifice, and will, if permitted, like the inhabitants of the plains, sacrifice animals. <sup>17</sup> |

There was a ratification ceremony through a form of oath taking peculiar to the Kondhs to seal this agreement followed by signing (thumb impression) on the written agreement.

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| <i>Sealing the accord</i> | The chiefs, seated on tiger skins held some rice, earth and water in hand and repeated the words, "May the earth refuse its produce, rice choke me, water drown me and tiger devour me and my children if I break the oath which I now take for myself and my people, to abstain for ever from the sacrifice of human beings."...My sword was then passed round from chief to chief, as a mark of submission on their part, and of protection on mine...Then presents were distributed. <sup>18</sup> |
|---------------------------|---|

This example of a council and negotiations includes steps in persuading and dissuading the Kondhs in the matter of Meria abolition. Through most of the process Campbell attempted to be friendly and conciliatory. Allowing participation and a degree of mutuality is evident from his narrative. Communication dynamics are at play, in crucial body language, gestures, acceptance of behavioural customs, efforts to impress, space for participation, dialogue, open statement of purpose, windows of illustrations, comparisons, contrasts and ceremonial sealing of the accord. From the side of the Kondh there was participation. They were represented by the chiefs and their people, they voiced their concerns, took time for private discussion and

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<sup>17</sup> Campbell, Major John. *A Personal Narrative*, p. 73.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

reflection, used interpreters, oath taking, ceremonies, pleasantries and sealing the agreement. Campbell emphasises that he made every possible attempt to win the hearts and minds of the people and make them see reason rather than threaten or impose from his side.

I went daily to their village...the trivial act of taking a light for my cigar from the first Khond at hand gained me many friends...omitted no opportunity of proving how sincerely I desired their welfare...I wearied both the Khonds and myself with every argument I could think of to induce them to desist from a practice detestable in the sight of God and man.<sup>19</sup>

Through these council negotiations Campbell was giving his rationale and trying to prove the absurdity of the sacrifice based on his belief and from his moral frame of reference. He also engaged the Kui in a rational and reasoning process. That the Kui, a deeply thinking people, had reflected on such a crucial matter, is clear. They held their ground. The accord was reached by the Kui accepting the authority of the British but not before shifting the entire guilt and responsibility for ceasing to perform such a solemn obligation on to their very masters. In fact Meria or the human victim was merely substituted with the buffalo. Campbell's Christian consciousness comes out repeatedly in his narratives, that his work had God's favour, "God, whose bountiful harvest so powerfully and mercifully seconded our effort."<sup>20</sup> So the basis of British EIC officers' logic against the Meria was British rationalisation which was Christian. They clearly saw their task to eradicate Meria as a sacred Christian 'mission' and cause.

## 2. Samuel Macpherson: Meria Suppression 'an imperative duty to God'

In this section I borrow from Padel's graphic details gleaned from the Company government's reports and letters. Macpherson took over from Campbell in 1841 and made strong demands to hand over the victims. Macpherson recommended a unified Meria Agency be carved out from the Madras, Bombay and Calcutta governments under which Kondh areas were scattered. The Agency was formed and he became its first Agent.

By Act XXI of December 1845, Macpherson finally became head of the Agency for the Suppression of Human Sacrifice and Female Infanticide in the Hill Tracts of

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<sup>19</sup> Campbell, Major John. *A Personal Narrative*, p. 78.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

Orissa—the Meriah Agency for short. As Agent...reported direct to the Governor-General in Calcutta (rather than to the Government of Madras, as previously)<sup>21</sup>

He wanted quick results, but because of his hasty and coercive methods he caused panic, resentment and even confusion. Besides he also had a personal dispute with his own colleagues who included Campbell, Dyce, MacVicar and Bannerman.<sup>22</sup> One example of his impatient action and the people's resentment is reflected in a letter written by a group of Kondh chiefs against him to Mr Mills at Cuttack,

Sri sri Maharaj the ruler, the Cuttack Govt. Sahib of the Tributary Mahals, The Mullicks, The Khonor, The Bissois, Dulbeheras and all the Khonds send innumerable salutations and in this desire write:

About ten years ago wicked men having much engaged in sacrificing human beings, and women having destroyed their young daughters, an order came from the Council (the Sudder house of the Sirkar) that these Meriah doings were no longer to be. From that day all have ceased. When Mr Macpherson Sahib, the Govt Agent Sahib, most unjustly called and ceased our ploughmen and labourers, whether poor, and miserable or happy, as Meriah children, he gave also rupees as a bribe to those who were afraid, and got men to build a fort of wood (for securing them) during the night and put them in it. The mothers, fathers, brothers of these persons seizing arms and making warlike preparations came in wrath and surrounded the Sahib. The Rajah of the Mahal being afraid caused them to desist. They did not comprehend this but said "Bring and give us our sons and daughters." The Rajah persuaded the Sahib to agree and we received them back. Macpherson Sahib gave them all up... We indeed never outraged the house of the Sahib. We have never committed murder. Had we done so we should have remained in fear and trembling as a tree in the midst of the jungle. Father it is right that the house of the Sirkar should show us kindness and protect us.<sup>23</sup>

There was an intellectual side to him. He was attracted to the spectacular nature of the Kondh religious sacrifices and made a thorough study of the rituals, the gods and the social and political organisations of the Kondhs. His observations and studies published in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* became basic to enquiry and research about Kui culture for years.<sup>24</sup> Macpherson's descriptions of the Kondh

<sup>21</sup> Padel, F. *The Sacrifice*, p. 72.

<sup>22</sup> Padel, F. *The Sacrifice*, pp. 75-108.

<sup>23</sup> This letter is quoted in Padel, F. *The Sacrifice of Human Beings*, pp. 82-83 and note 51 p. 347. (Dated November 1846 and preserved in Government of India Home Department, Public Consultations 27<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1847 no. 53). Padel argues that *merias* could also be regarded as slavery, a status symbol to their owners and often grew up as domestic and field labourer as mentioned here, 'ploughman, labourer' and 'sons and daughters'.

<sup>24</sup> See Macpherson, S C. "An Account of the religious opinions and Observances of the Khonds of Goomsur and Boad" in *JRAS*, vol. VII (1843), pp. 172-199 and "An Account of the Religions of the Khonds in Orissa" in *JRAS*, vol. XIII, (1852), pp. 216-275. His writings attracted attention of well

religion were from his Christian understanding and background. He described the Kondh Bura Penu, the Sky god worshiped as supreme in the eastern part, as the God of Light and “identified with the Christian God.” He claimed that he could dissuade the Kondhs from human sacrifice by turning them to Bura Penu or the ‘God of Light’. He also claimed that the Kondhs already considered that they had been subdued in the Ghumsur wars by Bura Penu.”<sup>25</sup> As his Christian understanding influenced his ideas of Kondh gods so also it influenced his judgement against Meria and female infanticide. He observed that Kondhs considered Dharni penu, the Earth Goddess as the source of evil and Bura as the source of good. All these ideas Padel dismissed as “highly simplistic.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly Dalton was also sceptical about Macpherson’s claims: his ‘system of theocracy and ethics’ he said, “appears to me to be a melange of Genesis, the several Hindu systems and primitive paganism.”<sup>27</sup>

Boal, on the other hand, who made a through study of Kondh rituals, witnessing the buffalo sacrifice and having access to Kogera Pradhan’s hand written notes on Kondh rituals, considered Macpherson ‘as true now as then’ and used his works.<sup>28</sup> Alexander Duff, the Scottish missionary in Calcutta, was a supporter of Macpherson and defended him.<sup>29</sup>

To Macpherson, Meria abolition was ‘an imperative duty to God and mankind’ and he was a zealous servant. He claimed a ‘Kondh movement’ to abandon the sacrifice was sweeping among the people due to a shift in importance to Dharni penu. He communicated his ideas of Bura and Dharni as good and bad respectively and this affected the thinking of people. Some began to have dreams indicating that Dharni Penu no longer wanted human blood. Macpherson’s ‘Kui’ theology and his stratification of local deities was actually Christian rather than tribal, but the amalgam – or Macpherson’s charisma - did influence the people.

### 3. J P Frye and MacVicar: Christian Philanthropy

When Frye took charge he too rescued some Merias and made the Kondhs accept the female Merias as wives to secure their position in the household in the

known anthropologists like James Fraser of the fame of *Golden Bough*, Herbert Risley and E T Dalton.

<sup>25</sup> Padel, F. *The Sacrifice*, p. 81.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>27</sup> Dalton, E T, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, p. 196.

<sup>28</sup> Boal, B. *Man, the Gods, and Search for Cosmic Wellbeing*, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Authored anonymously by Duff, A. “Goomsur: The Late War There—The Khonds or the Hill Tribes” in *The Calcutta Review*, Vol. V, No IX, Jan-Jun (1846) pp. 1-85.

absence of the Meria system. Frye was an Oriental linguist and the first to give the Kui dialect a written form with his translation of Psalm 67 and then the story of Joseph. In his own lithographic print he printed the first Kui books. He began establishing schools in 1849, wrote Kui primers for schools and general reading books which were based on Gospel texts. He had a missionary heart and was even approached by BMS missionaries in Berhampur to join them, but he chose not to. Frye encouraged Dr Cadenhead of the Company to learn Kui which he did, writing a Kui fable and Kui concept of 'Creation' to add to Frye's list.

Frye and MacVicar together rescued 294 Merias and together they also set up schools. Both were close friends of missionaries in Berhampur where they were both baptised. Pearce Carey comments, "for they not only rescued the doomed from destruction, but sowed in the minds of the Konds the first seed of intellectual and spiritual desire."<sup>30</sup> These officers were motivated and inspired by their own Christian background and ideals in their work and were guided by their Christian convictions.

## D. The Impact of the Officers' Action

### 1. Rescue and Rehabilitation

The rescued Meria victims rehabilitated in the Mission orphanages came under thorough Christian influence. Some were used as interpreters for missionaries: most remained in the plains and married, settling near to the Mission or Christian villages. There are many stories of how army commanders rescued a girl or boy or woman from the verge of sacrifice. Bannerman in 1838, with a force of 360 men arrived in a village already gathered to sacrifice a woman. The Kondh headman was arrested and the woman was rescued.<sup>31</sup> Macpherson rescued a man 'from under the knife' in Chakapad village. Campbell's rescue of a seven-year old girl called Oottama was equally sensational.

Of Ootama, a child of seven, of rare intelligence and sweetness, Colonel Campbell delighted to tell...The child was tied to the stake, and one of her legs were already been gashed, whose scar she would carry to her grave, when her deliverers rushed in. She had been sold by her own wicked father...<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Carey, P. *Dawn on the Kond Hills*, p. 25.

<sup>31</sup> Padel, Felix. *Sacrifice of Human Beings*, pp. 66 and 147.

<sup>32</sup> Carey, P. *Dawn on the Kond Hills*, p. 28.



Frye too rescued a girl who was about to be sacrificed. From 1836 rescued victims were regularly sent to missionary orphanages in Berhampore, Cuttack and Balasore, and "between 1836 and 1854 nearly 2000 were removed from Kondh villages," Campbell alone rescued 1260 of them.<sup>33</sup> Sitakanta Mohapatra, civil servant and author on Kondh tribal life and culture acknowledged,

According to our calculation during this period 1260 human beings had been saved from death and an entire people had been introduced to the idea of giving up the crime that had been sanctioned alike by antiquity and superstition. The contributions of Russell, Macpherson, Campbell and MacVicar in organising and eradicating the ritual have been appropriately praised and admired by historians.<sup>34</sup>

Rehabilitation was a substantial task. Campbell recruited many ex-Merias into his *Sebundy* corps (para-military): some also helped as interpreters in the officers' camps. The civil and military officers adopted many and Campbell had 12 as his servants. "Some were eagerly sought after for adoption by local craftsmen".<sup>35</sup> Some became peons and bearers in the Government service.

Missionaries in Cuttack trained a few in their agricultural farm and others were taught various crafts such as weaving, tailoring, midwifery, printing, bookbinding still others becoming evangelists and school teachers. The stories of Kalimanji, Komoli, Bima, Jessie, Nellie, Ootama, Paul Singh and Jano and how they were snatched from the edge of death became favourite missionary stories.<sup>36</sup>

## 2. Challenge to Kui Traditional System and Belief

The Meria campaign challenged the core belief of the Kui if not destroyed it completely. The *Kedu* or buffalo substitution, however, maintained the value and efficacies which were attached to Meria, and people over time came to accept it. But in some ways the absence of human sacrifice reduced the importance of the Jaani, the specialist priest. He was dislocated from his privileged position and office. The weakening of the hold of the traditional belief was set in by the Meria campaign. The removal of *merias* also affected the labour force as many had been used in field work.

<sup>33</sup> Padel, Felix. *Sacrifice of Human Being*, p. 144.

<sup>34</sup> Mohapatra, S. "Meria Sacrifice: Community Participation in a Ritual Murder" in Budhadeb, C (Ed). *Tribal Transformation in India*. Vol. V. New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1992, p. 163.

<sup>35</sup> Campbell, Major John. *A Personal Narrative*, p. 75.

<sup>36</sup> Carey, P. *Dawn on the Kondh Hills*, pp. 26-31.

Kondhs increasingly lost their isolation and were exposed to the outsiders and the outside world. New roads, schools, police station, court and village markets brought immigrants and traders from the plains, and they rapidly began to change the tribal landscape. Campbell encouraged visits of Kondhs to the plains "so they will mix freely with lowland neighbours...they came in large numbers, I was anxious to protect them against deception by the clever salespersons. But soon found the mountaineers as expert bargainers."<sup>37</sup> Weekly markets became hubs of inter-tribal and tribal-plains interaction and communication, exchanging information besides goods and novelties.

### 3. Kiamol (Campbell) and Mokodolla (Macpherson): What the Kui Saw in British Action?

These two officers deserve a special mention, for they entered deep into Kui memory, and were distinguished as representative figures. The people had quite a close encounter with the British. Their lives were disrupted and radical changes were introduced. They came to accept their authority and rule, addressed them in the formal and saluting language as 'Sahib', 'Maharajah the ruler', 'Government Sahib', 'Sirkar', 'Agent Sahib', 'Father', 'merciful protector' etc. But these do not reveal much except that these are the usual address of a subjugated people to their rulers. But the Kui myth and folklore that, in a sense, immortalised and included Campbell and Macpherson in their repository of oral history, see the upheavals in that history and in what ways the British changed them for ever.

At the time of the great Kiamol Saheb's coming the country was in darkness; it was enveloped in mist. And how was the country enveloped in mist? – there was murder and bloodshed; conflagration of villages; destruction of rice and crops. Brothers and uncles sat together and deliberated how they were to act. While they were discussing whether they would live or die the great Kiamol saheb, came.

All the people fled in terror; the saheb said, "Brothers, uncles, fear not; Maliko Kuaro, come to me."

Having sent militiamen to collect the people of the land, they having surrounded them, caught the Meriah sacrificers.

Having caught the Meriah sacrificers, they brought them; and again they went and caught the evil councillors (who supplied victims).

Having seen the chains and shackles, the people were afraid; murder and bloodshed were quelled.

Then the land was beautiful; and a certain Mokodella Saheb came.

He destroyed the lairs of the tigers and bears in the hills and rocks, and taught wisdom to the people.

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<sup>37</sup> Campbell, Major John. *A Personal Narrative*, p. 76.

After the lapse of a moon, he built bungalows and schools;  
 They learnt wisdom and reading; they acquired silver and gold; then all the people  
 became wealthy.<sup>38</sup>

This is the 'history' of the Meria campaign from the Kondh point of view and preserved by them.<sup>39</sup> The song seems to be clearly in two parts. The first part describes the original state of the Kui land with the violence of tribal feuding. The arrival of the British brought a higher force that stopped this tribal violence but also interfered in their own customs and practices. Campbell's assurances in gestures of negotiation has left its mark—'brothers, uncles fear not'. Interestingly the Meria suppliers are blamed, as usual. So did Meria represent a manipulation by the Jaani, the priests who benefited most in real terms and collaborated with the Pan: did they deliberately create a ritual interdependence to secure their place in the dominant Kondh community? It is difficult to prove. Padel does see an external aspect in Meria but more in terms of a system of slavery. In the poem Campbell and Macpherson are described by their action. The western urban and civic symbols of influence of 'schools' and 'bungalows' are equated with 'wisdom' and 'wealth'. It is also interesting to note that the peace time values for Kondhs are described in terms of 'wisdom', 'knowledge' and 'wealth'. Macpherson and Campbell are representative figures of British rule and also as agents of significant change.

From the Kui perspective the British impact on Kui traditional life was considerable. However, change was caused by persons and they mattered: ideology or doctrine was uninteresting. The persons mediated the change: Campbell and Macpherson represented the rule and the era of change. And wisdom and wealth were acknowledged as the outcome this period and seen to be symbolic of the Kondh's primary concerns and interests. Introduction of modern knowledge, business, education and commodities was overwhelming, all having their origin in the advent and invasion of Kiamol and Mokodola. Campbell's critical faith, Macpherson's comparative religion (he called the Kondh Bura Penu the Christian 'God of Light') and Captain Frye's practical philanthropy revealed their social Christian persona to people, Campbell and Macpherson becoming representative and mythical figures bringing 'wisdom', 'knowledge' and 'wealth'.

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<sup>38</sup> Friend-Pereira, J E. "Some Khond Songs" *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. Vol. LXVIII, Part III, No. 1, 1899, pp.1-13.

<sup>39</sup> Verrier Elwin has recorded over two hundred Kondh myths that consists of their story of origin and history. See Elwin, V. *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1954.

#### 4. Western and Christian Impact

Directly and indirectly, Kondh religious concepts were affected by the personal Christian influence and interference of these officers. The general cautious policy of the Company government's non-interference with local religion and custom was set aside in the case of Meria. Behind Meria abolition was the Christian conviction that it was contrary to God's law. The officers often engaged the Kui in discussion and argument that Meria was wrong, criminal and sinful. Missionaries also instigated against Meria, William Brown visited the place, collected information and wrote and published about the Kui Meria practices. Alexander Duff from Macpherson's and other sources wrote at length about the Kondh and the need to reform them.<sup>40</sup> Peggs' writings earlier had caused the removal of Puri Pilgrim Tax and British administration of the Jagannath temple.<sup>41</sup> For the officers like Russell, Macpherson, Campbell and others, Meriah was morally wrong and unsanctioned by God, and in these British officers the Kui encountered the Christian rationale challenging their central ritual concept and belief. The ex-Merias came under more direct Christian influence in their mission rehabilitation. Some accompanied missionaries on preaching tours to Kondh hills. To the Kui people these officers represented the new Western *and* Christian ideas.

#### E. The Person of the Missionary: People's First Impression

John Orissa Goadby<sup>42</sup> was the first to be sent as missionary to the Kui people. At his birth he was named Orissa and, true to his name, he joined the Orissa Mission as an adult. However, prior to Goadby, a notable visit to the Kondh hills had been made by missionary William Brown in 1836, from the Berhampur Mission, about hundred kilometres from G Udaygiri. Brown published two accounts of his visit, on Ghumsur war and the Kui people.<sup>43</sup> Goadby came in 1862, made the foothill station

<sup>40</sup> Duff, A. "Goomsur; The Late War There—The Khonds or the Hill Tribe" in *The Calcutta Review*, Vol. V No. IX, Jan-June (1846) pp. 1-85 and "Article II. The First Series of Government Measures for the Abolition of Human Sacrifices Among the Khonds" in *The Calcutta Review*, Vol. VI, No. XI, Jul-Dec (1846) pp. 45-108.

<sup>41</sup> Peggs, James. *India's Cries to British Humanity, Relative to Infanticide, British Connection with Idolatry, Ghaut murders, Suttee, Slavery, and Colonization in India; to which are added, Humane Hints for the Melioration of the State of Society in British India*. Third Edition Revised and Enlarged. London: Seely and Son, 1830. The Peggs were forced to leave Orissa Mission after the death of their three children. James Peggs wrote relentlessly from England against what he thought the social evils of India and against the colonising policies of the EIC.

<sup>42</sup> He was so named because at his birth one of his uncles, John Goadby, was on his way to India to be a missionary in Orissa.

<sup>43</sup> Brown, W. "Description of the Khonds or Khundas" in *Calcutta Christian Observer*, April (1836) 157-168 and June (1836) pp. 337-347.

of Russellkonda (Bhanjanagar) his base and toured the hills during the winter accompanied by coolies, attendants, tent and baggage, an ex-Meriah as his interpreter speaking the Gospel. Goadby also surveyed the roads and made notes about the people and land. However, for the people, he was a Saheb like the rulers: during a visit in 1865 “people’s interest gave way to suspicion that he and his party were Government spies.”<sup>44</sup> Goadby left for Cuttack that year to assist in the Great Famine of Orissa (1866) which killed a quarter of its population.<sup>45</sup> He died in Cuttack in 1868 at the age of 35.

Three missionaries came next but only after twenty six years later in 1891 as a result of the initiative from an unusual source—a Hindu Sub-Magistrate of Udaygiri town and his repeated request for a mission centre. We shall see more about him below. Missionaries Arthur Long, Abiathar Wilkinson and Thomas Wood made regular preaching visits from the base in the foothill. Soon all were struck by malaria, and in few months Wood died, ‘in the Magistrate’s house in Long’s arms’. In fact, all the three died in the mission field, Wilkinson in 1897 and Long in 1909, and were buried in Russellkonda. When Wood died the Kui refused to carry his body, as a stranger’s corpse was not handled. But the (Hindu) Sub-Magistrate intervened and threatened to carry it himself: they finally obliged. Wilkinson and Long made no headway and, due to their contact with Pans and Kondhs, they also risked becoming untouchable to Oriya higher castes, mainly Brahmins. Long wrote, “I am going to see a Brahmin lady, a widow. Rightly, if I go into her house, she ought to bring cow dung and smear the floor, scrub everything I touch, make atonement through a priest, etc., etc.”<sup>46</sup>

## F. The Indian Bridge for the Missionary Message

Two individuals who became the bridge between the missionary and the Kui culture were both of Telugu background. One was a Hindu government officer and the other a Christian preparing for Christian ministry in Cuttack Theological School. The first, Mr Sarajiva Naidu, Sub-Magistrate of G Udaygiri, initiated the permanent mission in the Kondh hills. The second was John Biswas, a student of theology encouraged by Arthur Long to consider joining the mission. John was the key to building the cultural bridge for the gospel to reach the Kui.

<sup>44</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Konds...*p. 79.

<sup>45</sup> See Patnaik, Gorachand. *The Famine and Some Aspects of the British Economic Policy in Orissa, 1866-1905*. Cuttack: Vidyapuri, 1980.

<sup>46</sup> Carey, P. *Dawn on the Kondh Hills*, p. 57.



## 1. The Hindu Sub-Magistrate's Initiative in Christian Mission

The initiative for a permanent mission centre in the Kondh hills came from the Sub-Magistrate of Udaygiri, Mr Sarajiva Naidu, a Telugu speaking Hindu. He requested the missionaries in Berhampur town to establish a Christian mission station in Udaygiri. He also offered land and other services and promised to "do all he could to further the Cause."<sup>47</sup> What could have been his motive, except that he might have thought mission work would bring positive development and enlightenment to the people through missionary work? Being a government functionary himself and instead of asking for a government development agency, which would have been more usual for him, he not only desired but showed determination to get Christian mission service for the tribal hills. While we may never know his motive, one fact is clear that except for the missionaries no one from the educated Oriyas was willing to serve among the tribals and Pans in those days. Even today the attitude has not changed radically. Boal wrote in 1963,

...as early as 1908 L S O'Malley of the Bengal Secretariat wrote "the tract is so unhealthy that outsiders fear to visit it, and it is reported that the ordinary Oriya of the plains regards service in it as almost equivalent to a death sentence". The same feeling still prevails. Many regard service there as a penalty from which one must attempt to be delivered by transfer as soon as, or even before, arrival from the plains; and this is in spite of a special pay allowance in the Agency.<sup>48</sup>

Missionary P E Heberlet in Berhampur quoted Mr Naidu's request in the Orissa Mission Report for 1889 and three young men, Long, Wilkinson and Wood came in response to this call.<sup>49</sup> Mr Naidu met them in Berhampore when they were learning the language. In January 1891, all three moved to Udaygiri and Naidu sent his men halfway down the hill to welcome and usher them on to Udaygiri. He promised to arrange for Kui and Oriya pundits for Bible translation and guided them in their itineraries of the hills. Thus Christian mission was introduced in the hills by a Hindu government officer and he laid its foundation; the infrastructures of location, personnel and Bible translation were all put up through his initiative and effort.

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<sup>47</sup> Carey, S P. *Dawn on the Kond Hills*, p. 42.

<sup>48</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Church in the Kondh Hills*, p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> *Indian Report of the Orissa Baptist Mission*, 1888-89, p. 27.



## 2. John Biswas: the Bridge for the Gospel

John Biswas was a very gifted evangelist: without him, the Kui mission would perhaps not have survived. Biswas was the first mission person to move to the hills to live there continuously while missionaries visited from their Russellkonda base. As a Telugu speaker, Biswas soon learned Kui and could speak fluently. He was talented in music and played violin, which became a good asset for his preaching. He was also a good hunter with his gun, a quality which the Kui understood and appreciated well. Biswas being a plains man nevertheless became popular with the Kui and endeared himself to people establishing close relationships with them unlike the Oriyas who normally were careful to avoid physical contact, food or intimate relationship with Pans and Kondhs whom they regarded as low and untouchable. Literate and trained in theology, Biswas valued education and personally encouraged the Kui to send their children to school. Senior Kui church leader, Paul Pradhan, speaking to me in an interview, said,

Here children were not naturally interested in going to school. But John *Aba* was very good with children. He will give them *mudhi* (rice crisps) and some peppermint candy as incentive to attend school. Bisi was a priest here, a *Kutagatanju* of this village, and he was also attending the Mission school. John *Aba* used to regularly visit Bisi in his home. He would read to Bisi from the Luke and John's Gospel. Bisi was also reading *Muktira Marga* (*The Way of Salvation*). John *Aba* lived here and missionaries lived in Bhanjanagar (Russellkonda). They used to come up and camp in Udaygiri in the John Bungalow and move around on horse. They used to visit here and return to Bhanjanagar what was Russellkonda then.<sup>50</sup>

Led and counselled by Biswas, the Kui priest Bisi and his family, who were already reading the Gospel books, became Christian. Their baptism in April 1914 was first among the Kui after twenty three years of evangelism. After Bisi, a school teacher named Poto Pradhan and his wife, much respected in their village, became Christians. The conversions since have generally followed this 'family pattern' through out the Kondh hills. The first Kui church met in Biswas' house and was attended by many, not just Christians only.

Biswas' role was crucial in the breakthrough in conversion. Until his involvement the gospel remained unintelligible and did not communicate to produce response from the people. For them the person had to live the message among them

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<sup>50</sup> Interview # 42. Son of Poto Pradhan, the teacher and one of the earliest notable Christian converts.

and present it in the 'language' that spoke to their imagination, it was only the person and role of Biswas which could do that. He was liked both by missionaries and the Kui people, among whom he integrated very well. Joseph Johnson, a missionary to the Kui between 1916-22, and a friend of Biswas, commented,

I made friends with John Biswas, the resident evangelist. He has gone now to his reward, but he was well named the 'faithful' (Biswas means faith). For that he was; more faithful than I shall ever be. We had much in common. He was a good 'shikari' and so am I, though not so good as he. He possessed an old blunderbuss, a muzzle-loader, a rough old weapon; but he was wonderfully accurate with it, and accounted for many a marauding leopard and bear.<sup>51</sup>

And Boal found that "Despite his being a plainsman, he earned an unusual place in their regard, still being mentioned with respect fifty years later."<sup>52</sup> Biswas died in 1926. It was an indigenous and personal incarnational role which could build the necessary cultural bridge for the gospel message across to the Kui, which missionary power and influence could not for the previous twenty three years.

### G. The Missionary Era: Before the Kondh Conversion Movement

From 1908 (and after Long's death) other missionaries began to arrive. Peter Horsburgh, Oliver Millman, Edward Evans, Walter Wilkins, Joseph Johnson, Hugh Craig and others with families, Freda Laughlin, Daisy Webb, Edna Jarry and other single women filled the ranks of the early missionary era, one marked by paternalism and a not unexpected tendency to elitism. Those arriving since the 1930s and 40s were relatively more open to Indian leadership and to working alongside the Kui—Pan and Kondh. The economic Depression of the 1930s and the difficult World War years affected the mission but, apart from these periods, the Kondh hills mission was one of the largest Baptist Mission centres. This was still the time of the Raj, and the mission made good links with the government, receiving government deputations and financial grants for the hospital. Grimes and Evans had been 'nominated by the Government as the representative and spokesman for the Hill Tribes in the Advisory Council of the new Province of Orissa', a tremendous position of influence which could have been manipulated for proselytisation if they had so wished. Wilkins wrote,

The Orissa Government showed interest in our activities from the Governor downward. Two visits from His Excellency Sir John and Lady Hubback have

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<sup>51</sup> Carey, Pearce. *Dawn on the Kond Hills*, p. 84.

<sup>52</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Konds*, p. 181.

already been mentioned...Mr Evans was nominated to represent hill tribes such as the Konds, and was the only European in the Assembly...He was elected to the Standing Orders Committee to draw up rules of procedures...His presence at the centre of power in Cuttack was a great asset but of course it did mean he was away frequently.<sup>53</sup>

The mission during this period built two large buildings, few large missionary bungalows, two hostels, one Primary and one Middle school and lastly and most impressive the Moorshead Mission Hospital in 1939. All these were in Gudripodi, on the tableland of G Udaygiri and close to areas of Pan concentration.

The missionaries of this period enjoyed an image of power, authority and paternalism. The institutional structures, organisation and even the missionary vehicles were symbolic of missionary power and money. The missionary focus was largely on preaching the Gospel and basic literacy, with much attention to moral and disciplinary aspects on the lines of Baptist doctrine, with the total prohibition of drinking, smoking and sexual immorality. A separate Disciplinary Committee was set up by the Mission to arbitrate on these matters. Evans himself prepared the Holy Communion elements at his residence and gave them out to Kui pastors on Sundays to ensure proper handling and observance.<sup>54</sup> There was a tension between the older missionaries such as Evans and younger missionaries arriving just before or after the Second World War. Dr Wilkins wrote, "Mr Evans made criticisms of us to Scott Wells, Dr Chesterman and Mrs Moorshead (visiting dignitaries from BMS for the opening of the Moorshead Memorial Hospital). Details of personality problems of times long past are best forgotten, but it would not be truthful to suggest they did not exist."<sup>55</sup>

The missionary work from the 1940s concentrated more on the medical mission, schools other than three near the Mission centre being handed over to the government. Missionaries concentrated on training their pastors and evangelists. Missionary wives were also engaged in training women and girls in adult literacy, new skills of house keeping, health and hygiene. While the administration remained in missionary hands, the gradual transition from mission to church started with Independence.

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<sup>53</sup> Wilkins, E Gordon. *By Hands, Bullocks and Prayers: The Building of the Moorshead Memorial Hospital, Kond Hills, Orissa, India*. Hampshire: Ashford Colour Press, 1987, pp. 90-91

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Rev Bruce Henry in his Brighton residence in July 2002.

<sup>55</sup> Wilkins, E G. *By Hands, Bullocks and Prayers*, p. 89.

Conversions of this period were largely among the Pans and except a few scattered incidents no conversions took place among the tribal Kondhs. The Pans were being increasingly equipped as church leaders and taking over the responsibility of the mission and ministry of the emerging church. They were also socially and economically advancing with professional training as teachers, nurses, and other job opportunities which were helping their social status and economy.

## H. The Missionary Persona as Message

The missionary life was itself a message. Though there were many different facets of missionary life and different images of individual missionaries, the early missionary life in particular was one of hardships, suffering and early death. Most of them were deeply dedicated, zealous in preaching and service and had vision and calling to missionary work which they enjoyed doing. They intended well for the people and were doubtless genuinely interested in their welfare. Yet as humans they had their short comings, failures and blind spots which they seemed to ignore or be unaware of: but given the close proximity of their lives, the people could observe inconsistencies between message and messenger.

### 1. Missionary Zeal and Hardships

In general, the word 'missionary' evoked the image of a dedicated, zealous, and upright person.<sup>56</sup> Most suffered from the deadly malaria, fever or small-pox. Kondh hills mission produced its martyrs, who fell not to religious or political enemies but to the dreaded malaria, fever and small-pox. All the first four missionaries to Kondh hills died young in the mission field. The missionary's personal circumstances, self-sacrifices, long years of separation from family and home did not go unnoticed in the face-to-face community in which they lived and worked; sufferings and death made powerful stories, at home and in the field. Millman's child, born to them after eleven years of marriage, died, and the mother's health deteriorated. They returned to England in 1917, but Millman's zeal brought him back to India and for eleven more years he served alone in Serampore. Winfield and his wife had to leave the hills due to ill health. His wife returned to England with their children and Winfield worked alone in Serampore for another six years.<sup>57</sup> In

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<sup>56</sup> Dhall, Manjusri. *The British Rule: Missionary Activities in Orissa-1822-1947*. New Delhi: Har-Anand. 1997. See also Das, G N. "Missionary Zeal" in *Adivasi*, Vol. 8, No. 3, October 1966.

<sup>57</sup> Carey, Pearce. *Dawn on the Kondh Hills*, pp. 77-92.

general missionary life-style was simple. They often faced hardship as they chose to live in remote tribal areas. Dedicated to the cause of the Gospel they were prepared to face hardships and in zeal and dedication they were often exemplary.

## 2. Life-Style, Relationship and Communication

The closest image and impression about the missionary was gained from his/her life-style and relationship with people. Missionaries claimed a clear call to missionary life and generally lived a simple and austere life compared to their fellow westerners in government or army service. Missionaries also upheld the simple life-style as a virtue. Missionaries learned the local language which was the first and essential step to understanding and relationship beyond the superficial. In this respect they were far closer to the people than most outsiders involved in tribal development. They lived in the tribal land continuously and travelled, often by foot, to distant villages and made contact and friendship. There was a gradual transition from the early paternalistic attitude to working alongside fellow Kui Christians and even accepting their leadership. In fact sincere efforts were made to train promising Kui Christians in Cuttack and Serampore Theological Colleges, and in other secular training centres, so they would be equipped to take over the leadership of the church and its mission.

Kui Christians in general retain a deep respect and gratitude to the missionaries for bringing the Gospel to them and changing their lives. They have seen a level of sincerity and trustworthiness in the missionary which was often lacking in many among their own neighbouring community and people. Missionaries who lived so close to them and spoke of the love of God did occupy a dear place in their hearts.

People of far off villages beyond Baliguda remember and appreciate missionaries' visits on foot and on cycles, their preaching and sleeping over in their homes, accepting hospitality, selling books and Bibles, showing films, visiting the sick, giving medicines and praying in their homes.<sup>58</sup> Today, missionaries are generally remembered as benevolent, loving and caring persons who preached about God's love, taught them many new things and were very successful in medical treatment. Missionaries accepted the address of *Abba* and *Aja* from Kui people, a respected term meaning father and mother, and also reciprocated accordingly.

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<sup>58</sup> Interview # 43 with a young Kondh leader of the Church.



### 3. Power and Authority

Yet at the same time there was distance, there were blind spots and even blunders which some point out. They also carried an image of power and authority. The image of power and authority of the British rule over-shadowed the early missionaries, marking them as being too close to the rulers. Missionaries also had access and proximity to power, and from the outside were often seen as being part of the political establishment, with horses, bungalows, servants and holidays. The manners, attitudes, style and actions of certain missionaries served to confirm this image. Mission institutions and organisations symbolised power and resources, as did the retention of administrative control and mission finance by the missionaries.

### 4. Missionary Limitations and Failures

In a strictly denominational frame and in the context of a zealous evangelical mission the relation between the missionary and the Kui people was limited to practical or salvific spheres. In most other respects there was clear separation. The cultural isolation many missionaries experienced or lived in is apparent in the experience of missionary Brian Windsor which he mentioned in an article he wrote reflecting on a preaching tour to a village where people lived and then compared life in the mission compound where he lived.

Ten minutes in the car we are back in our own surroundings. Back in the semi-English atmosphere of letters from home, BBC news broadcasts, Vietnam, the Budget, and what's for dinner? Our world so different in almost every way from theirs, so relatively replete in every necessity, but one with them in our need as human being for a Saviour.<sup>59</sup>

Padel comments that, "The way they organised space and the material objects they used all stressed missionaries' separateness from the Kondhs they lived among, and implied the 'superiority' of their culture."<sup>60</sup>

Evans at times was rude and arrogant. He was well-built, tall and also domineering. Early missionaries like him maintained a policy of zero tolerance to the drinking practice of the Kui. Once returning from a preaching tour, Evans spotted a group of Kondhs brewing rice liquor on the roadside which made him furious. In his mission report for that year it is clear how he dealt with them, "On our way home

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<sup>59</sup> Windsor, Brian. "Preaching the Gospel in a Kui Village" in *The Missionary Herald*, September 1965, p. 138.

<sup>60</sup> Padel, Felix, *The Sacrifice of Human Being*, p. 214.



(from the preaching tour of the annual festival at Koinjur) I caught a number of men secretly distilling. Taking the law into my own hands, I threw away the liquor and destroyed the vessels...At our next halting place we saw much drunkenness and again I destroyed the liquor and cooking vessels.”<sup>61</sup> No doubt the missionaries meant well and rightly saw the ruin brought by drunkenness and exploitation of tribals by commercial brewers. But in their missionary zeal they trampled on the very culture to which they were called to incarnate the gospel and ground down everything in it which was vital, enriching and essential to the tribal life—be it drinking, dancing, drumming, dressing (or lack of it) or other everyday aspects of the culture. Such an attitude was blatant, harsh and visible to the people. At other times, missionary attitudes of superiority were more complex, the control and contempt for local ways of life more subtle: impatience, demands for punctuality, insistence on European discipline and everyday rules. Both the blatant attacks on Kui culture and the more subtle ones had implications for the purpose and the process of mission.

However, in judging the missionary action or attitude, difficult individuals and incidents must be seen against the overall scheme. Missionaries were there to change people as they thought proper in that era, conditioned by their own context and frame of faith. They were part of the ideology and spirit of mission and missionary movement of their time, and it is only fair to see them in that light.

## I. The Kui Message-Bearer

The persons who actually communicated the gospel and led in a conversion movement were the Kui themselves. First, they could speak the matters of utmost importance to their people in the appropriate ‘language’ which their people understood. Communication of the message for the matters of heart and soul needed to be in language and idiom of the people and not of the preacher. The evangelists were mostly Pans who traditionally had a role as village messengers. They also functioned as traders and the mediator between the Kondh and the outside world. That background of the Pans was their main asset as Christian communicators. Secondly, the changing status and fortune of the Pan gave a loud message to their neighbour Kondhs. The church which was now the new Pan community and its new image of confidence, assertiveness and claim to equality was becoming increasingly visible to others. In the Kondh conversion movement the earlier Pan church played

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<sup>61</sup> “Orissa Report-Kond Hills Tracts (Ganjam) Udaygiri” in *BMS Indian Report: Bengal, Orissa, North India and Ceylon for 1914*. Calcutta: BMS Press, 1995, p. 35.

the significant role. Thirdly, the Kondhs themselves, who eventually led the largest conversion movement after the missionaries had gone, communicated the message and the stories of current conversions through their own communication dynamics. Family members, relatives or fellow Kondh, shared, discussed, argued and reasoned in their own circles, influencing each other as they decided to become Christian. More than any other modes of Christian communication, it was the person who was both source and the message itself. The missionary brought the message, and while the core was conveyed, the covering was entangled in external power and attitudes. The process did not gain steam until the Kui became the messengers. We shall cover this in more detail in the last chapter, where I examine the indigenous converts as the agents of their own conversion process.

## Conclusion

The Kui encountered the Christian message in persons. Initially, the East India Company officers, who represented a Christian faith and expressed it in their many negotiations and other engagements against the Kondh practice of human sacrifice and infanticide. They are remembered in Kondh folk lore for the upheaval caused to the land by the arrival of the British and the way their lives were ultimately changed for the better.

Following on, the missionary preached and represented Christianity in more obvious and direct ways. However well liked they were, they remained at a level higher than the people and the gospel message as they presented it did not appeal directly to the Kondhs. Their distance, and their association with imperial power, communicated conflicting messages. In principle their methods of Christian communication were generally sound; entrusting the gospel communication to the Kui evangelists was successful.

It was only through the actual participation and skills of the Kui evangelists and enthusiastic volunteers that the dissemination of the gospel message took place. They were involved in many different roles as evangelists, pastors, teachers, health workers, women workers, youth workers and voluntary witness of the gospel and Christian story. Through their words and the changing life-style brought about by mission education, health service and life in the church they communicated a new image and a new identity that was attractive. They were the actual message-bearers and real agents of change in the conversion movement which was a result of their power and participation.

## Chapter Three

### The Spoken Word in Evangelisation

“The words of one’s mother-tongue are sweeter to the ear and sink deeper”

John Orissa Goadby

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw first that the person of the communicator or the message-bearer was both medium and message. the person and the *persona* representing and communicating the Christian message. In this chapter I shall examine the spoken word, the most common means of evangelisation, significant for both credibility and impact. The Kui language was spoken and communication was oral until the British officers and, more thoroughly, missionaries introduced writing. Kui was spoken at home, only the educated and some living closer to road communication speaking Oriya. More recently, some speak Telugu, Hindi or English. Literacy was very low and the spoken word was common to most forms of communication in the community.

Writing on the ‘psychodynamics of orality’ Walter Ong commented on the power and action in the spoken. He goes on, “Oral people commonly, and probably universally, consider words to have great power.”<sup>1</sup> He reiterated Malinowski’s view that “among the ‘primitive’ (oral) people generally (spoken) language is a mode of action and not merely a countersign of thought”<sup>2</sup> which is also equally true of writing: it may also be true in any context. Regarding tribal oral tradition in India, Patrick, remarks on the dynamic function of the oral mind, oral culture and oral social interactions uncontrolled by a fixed written text.<sup>3</sup> There is instantaneity in the spoken; it is personal, ‘perspective-ridden’ and at the same time it is evanescent, i.e. “it exists only when it is going out of existence.”<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the spoken word can evoke the past for reasons related to the present. Jan Vansina has argued

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<sup>1</sup> Ong, Walter. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Routledge, 1999, pp. 31-32.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick, G. *The Role of Oral tradition in Theology: Theology in the tribal Context*, Series 2, Shillong: Vendrame Publications, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Ong, W J. *Orality and Literacy*, p.32.

for the African oral tradition as history or 'document' from the past.<sup>5</sup> Memory played an important role and oral sources had special value as subjective and spoken testimony, asserts Paul Thompson<sup>6</sup>.

In the Kui community, oral personal communication was the basis of relationships as they lived in a face-to-face and continual oral contact in day-to-day life. The ritual words of the Kui priests established links and communication with the unseen realm that governed their beliefs and even daily life. The spoken word had a complex and dynamic role in the community.

In evangelisation therefore, it was the spoken word that largely communicated the Christian gospel, through preaching and teaching, and more frequently through informal chat, conversations or sharing of stories. Personal presence, mother tongue and local idiom, the requisites of effective spoken communication, were also the strengths of Christian mission in this respect. Initially, the missionaries travelled the hills, preaching and meeting people. But the actual force that communicated and could touch people's heart was their own, the evangelist-pastors and other volunteers. The conversion movement was driven by personal word of mouth - through circulating stories of conversions, counselling of evangelists, persuasion and witness of converted relatives and neighbours and through what the missionary called, 'gossiping the gospel' by the converts.

It is in this context of a wider and dynamic use of the spoken word that the Christian communication and its impact need to be understood. In this chapter I shall bring to light the role of the spoken medium in evangelization, particularly focusing on the spoken modes of preaching, teaching, praying, testimony, counselling, visiting, singing, house-meetings or church worship which were the means of spreading as well as practising the new faith.

### A. The Socio-Religious Dynamics of the Kui Spoken Word

Kui is a vigorous spoken language with a detailed vocabulary for all objects of the forest and mountain covered village life. With ample idioms, similes and metaphors the language is graphic and nuanced. It has borrowed freely from Oriya and Telugu, which is why it is somewhat easier for the speaker of these two languages to recognise many of the nouns and verbs and to be able to communicate after a little effort.

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<sup>5</sup> Vansina, Jan. *Oral Tradition as History*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

<sup>6</sup> Thompson, Paul. *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*. Oxford: OUP, 2000, p. 118.

The spoken word played an important and wide role, both in everyday communication and in formal and ceremonial occasions. Sealing a land deal or contract, resolving disputes: all transactions and agreements were verbal and the oral word was final and binding.<sup>7</sup> The law codes and statutes were unwritten and ceremonially and symbolically addressed and bestowed. The elders made decisions following custom and tradition and the younger ones were expected to accept.<sup>8</sup> Kui children learnt the norms and expectations of domestic and clan life from parents and community through verbal instruction or imitation. It also included learning necessary survival skills, livelihood and art.<sup>9</sup> Writing and school education were introduced by the British but it was through the Oriya language. However the Kui received a great deal of emphasis from the missionaries who began to translate the Bible and set up schools in the Kui medium. But Kui as a medium of instruction in schools did not succeed for long and Oriya returned to education again. Nevertheless Kui has remained in the use of church worship and socio-religious life.

However, all levels of social contact and relationship were maintained through oral communication. Conversation is usually frank and people speak as they think. Kui socialisation and entertainment are through open humour, drink parties, songs, dance, tales and ritual celebrations. The tribal culture is an integrated whole and so entertainment is also education. Their riddles, proverbs, humour, teasing, along with songs, dances and music with bodily expressions sharpened their wit and shaped up all-round personal growth. The liveliness of the personal and spoken human contact determined the quality of human relationships in the community where communication is normally direct, spoken and personal. Memory played an important role, retaining what was of most important in experience and for practical living: the rest could be forgotten.

Oral contact was necessary for quality relationships and cohesion in social life. The spoken word was valid; oral codes of practices and agreements between people were binding on all. When the British introduced writing, the western concept of the verbal as merely provisional and temporary compared to the written, seen as official and authorized, came into practice. However, in the Kui community the

<sup>7</sup> Patnaik, N R. *History and Culture of Khond Tribes*. New Delhi: Commonwealth, 1992, pp.38-71.

<sup>8</sup> Missionary educationist Alexander Duff who among others described the Kondhs to the outside world in a series of articles totally missing the part of the authoritative nature of the spoken word, wrote "They did not possess anything like a code of written laws and statutes, passed by competent legislative authority." in *Calcutta Christian Observer*, vol. V, No. IX, 1846, p. 44.

<sup>9</sup> School education has not spread widely and lack of schools and teachers is still a problem in many parts of the areas. In interior parts life has remained the same as before, without roads, electricity, schools or basic amenities.



spoken word had credibility and carried total authority. In the ritual context, the words of the priest - the *Kutagatanju* or the *Jaani* - was accepted as powerful and mystical.

The oral tradition is closely linked to the ritual functions where the spoken word is powerful and performative. The potency and power of the spoken word is believed to be in the command, invocation and utterance of the *Jaani* or the *Kutagatanju*, the Kui priests.<sup>10</sup> Their ritual words and utterances were both effective and dangerous. These could be impromptu, incomprehensible, and inaudible to the listener but to the practitioner and people alike the power lies in these qualities and the mystery surrounded it. Thus the spoken word is power-laden, and efficacious as it could wreck a standing crop, strike a fever or kill. At the deeper social level, there is an 'interiority' and 'sacral' nature of the oral in ritual, as Ong observes.<sup>11</sup> The spoken word comes from within the depths of the person. It is incorporated into the invocation, prayer, chant or song forming the interior part of the ritual. The written unless transformed into the spoken, remains an external element. Speaking the words established the link with the unseen which is also the source of energy, health, healing and prosperity.

The Kui oral repertoire contains many myths, stories, songs, proverbs, rites and rituals. These often recount the tribe's origin, some momentous events like the Meria suppression, crisis situations like a tiger or bear attack or contemporary and entertaining situations. Elwin has recorded over 250 Kui myths, told as stories or in songs.<sup>12</sup> Patrick argued for a wide ranging role of oral genres, functioning as agents of 'social control', 'social protest' and 'social change'.<sup>13</sup> The myths and legends are agents of solidarity and continuity of the oral society, the proverbs aid in authoritative argument in favour of the status quo: stories/songs of pathos are indirect expressions of protest against oppression. For the Kondhs, write Nayak, Boal and Soreng,

Traditional myths have a deeper purpose and meaning...They are not fanciful folk tales to be shared on some relaxed social occasion. They are the firm foundation on which Kondh religious, social and ethical norms are established. By providing sanctions, they regulate daily life both for the community and the individual in their behaviour toward one another, and establish the validity of community rites. Through them the Kondhs' relationship with their deities is made continuously

<sup>10</sup> Patrick, G. *The Role of Oral Tradition in Theology: Theology in the Tribal Context*. Shillong: Vendrame Institute, 1999, p. 70.

<sup>11</sup> Ong, W. *Orality and Literacy*, pp. 71-75.

<sup>12</sup> Elwin, Verrier. *Tribal Myths of Orissa*. Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1954.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick, G. *The Role of Oral Tradition*, pp. 86-90.



explicit by means of their community celebrations. In return they receive not just the expectation of protection throughout the year, and of another season's fertility of crops, but a strong sense of identity as people.<sup>14</sup>

Boal observed a still deeper role of the myth recounting when a 'living activated relationship takes place'.

Through the recounting of myth in the midst of the community, both priest and hearer become linked anew not only with each other but through the power of the spoken word they re-involve themselves as the living representatives of their ancestors...<sup>15</sup>

The Kui language makes generous use of rhymes, rhythms, mimicry, riddle, hyperbole, and sounds indicating words. Nayak, Boal and Soreng write,

"The people's shawl has gone!" said by one Kui person to another does not simply indicate that the winter sun has set. Rather it assumes a full understanding of the cold season, the economic poverty of the Kui people in their scanty cotton clothing, and the pattern of life in the winter when all possible tasks are done out-of-doors in the passing warmth of the sun. This is true communication: when both speaker and hearer fully comprehend the assumptions that underlie the spoken word.<sup>16</sup>

Nayak (a Kui), Boal and Soreng further emphasised that "One of the greatest riches of the Kondhs, wide open to the use of development workers...is the Kui language."<sup>17</sup> In programmes of socio-economic change or in mission the mother-tongue was more suitable for the diffusion of new ideas and their internalization, the information or ideology effectively touching peoples' imagination. While the proverbs or sayings maintained traditional wisdom, some songs and myths gave evidence of earlier change in history. This could be utilised to validate people seeking to escape a socio-economic disability or to adopt new ideas or ways of life. Ideas and information, therefore, which were conveyed personally and in the language of the heart, speaking directly to peoples' sentiments and touching their imagination, could pave the way for further and even for radical change.

The British and the successive Indian government however, imposed Oriya in education and administration. A change of emphasis from oral to written began under the British. The change was mainly in areas of formal or official communication

<sup>14</sup> Nayak, Radhakant, Boal, Barbara and Soreng, Nabor. *The Kondhs: A Handbook for Development*. New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1990, p. 48.

<sup>15</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Kondhs: Human Sacrifice and Religious Change*. Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1982, p. 96.

<sup>16</sup> Nayak, Boal and Soreng. *The Kondhs*, p. 47.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

such as in administration, legal or business matters. In all other areas of life - social, religious, occupation and art - communication remained predominantly oral and aural, accompanying body language and movements. As a result the people have increasingly become bi-lingual, speaking Kui at home and using Oriya as the business language. Through education, job or business with the outside world they also came to know some Telugu, Hindi or English and this is more true of men and the younger generation. But Kui still remained the heart language.<sup>18</sup> The government favouring Oriya in education and administration was due to a policy of tribal assimilation with the main stream Oriya culture but perhaps more practically for the ready availability of resources of Oriya teachers and text-books. The missionary policy from the beginning was different, favouring the Kui language in the spoken and written media, in evangelism, worship, Bible translation and education.

## B. The Spoken Word of Evangelisation

It is in this above context of a dynamic role of the spoken word and the role of the mother tongue in matters of the heart and mind that the gospel communication was carried out. Although the missionaries too, like the government, emphasised writing and literacy for the Kui and introduced reading, writing and school education and wrote textbooks, the fundamental difference was their emphasis on the Kui language, personal spoken contact and physical presence as far as possible. The Baptist Mission had been well known since the time of William Carey for giving the Bible and educating people in the vernacular language. The Baptists firmly believed in the translating Holy Scripture into the vernacular including the spoken dialects. At the same time emphasis was given to people-to-people contact and speaking to them in their own language. The mission then trained and utilised the new converts because they were better communicators, even though less well-educated than the missionaries, in presenting the gospel to their own people.

One of the first things the Baptist missionaries did was to learn Kui so they could relate to people and communicate in matters of deeper concern. Some among them became proficient in Kui and could not only converse fluently but composed church hymns and translated Bible books; Walter Winfred wrote a thorough grammar of the Kui language.<sup>19</sup> Barbara Boal produced in-depth studies of the

<sup>18</sup> There are some Oriya speaking Pan areas, and those Pans also could speak Kui fluently. The rest of the Pans of Ghumsur or today's Kondhmal district are all Kui speaking.

<sup>19</sup> Winfred, Walter W. *A Grammar of the Kui People*. Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1928.

Kondh traditional rites and ritual practices from oral sources, observation, and a rare handwritten notebook of an early literate Kondh. Oliver Millman made a robust attempt to promote education through the Kui medium. Moreover, he trained many Kui teachers who joined his own Mission schools and many more government schools. But not all of them were good in Kui: some spoke better Oriya and communicated in Oriya.

Evangelism was predominantly spoken as that was the way people communicated with and related to each other. The government administrators generally preferred to operate from centres in cities and visit occasionally. In contrast the mission's willingness to get close to people even in their remote and inhospitable hills was appreciated, though this did not mean the immediate acceptance of its message. In contrast the government's decisions about tribal development were mostly made in distant cities and remained in the hands of personnel from outside. These Oriya officers from the plains were reluctant workers in the tribal field and tried their best to be transferred away from it. Lack of road communication was and is blamed for neglect of tribal development<sup>20</sup> but missionaries and the local evangelists travelled around and walked where any vehicle could not go. Attempt to get over obstacles and hurdles, from language to climate and from physical to relational, put them at an advantage in access and contact with people, and the contrast with government officers was very significant. Such personal outreach was important in paving the way for change. The new converts in their turn were persuasive when they narrated their own stories, experiences and confidence in the new faith and did it in their own ways. A distinct group of school teacher-evangelists were among them.

## 1. Some Vital Early Missionary Contacts and Visits

Early missionary work mainly meant trekking over the hills and making personal visits and preaching. The first missionary contact with the Kui was perhaps when Rev William Brown from the Berhampur mission visited some villages in 1837 soon after the Kondh war of resistance. He went round the ruined hamlets and tried to speak to people with the help of an interpreter.<sup>21</sup> He personally took care of and

<sup>20</sup> Sarkar, H S. *The Kutia Kondhs: A Description of Their Life-style*. BBSR: NISWASS, 1991, p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Padel's imaginary view that "Reverend Brown probably cut a bizarre figure to the Konds he met, wandering in tight, black, clerical garb through devastated villages, speaking of Life Hereafter" is unfounded. They are normally pictured with wearing coat, tie and hat, much like their European compatriots in the government. The Baptist missionaries neither wore clerical garb nor tight or black robes as he described. Orissa history provides an interesting parallel to Rev Brown's visit to the war

rehabilitated some Meria victims in his home and sent some to the Mission's orphanage in Chhatrapur. He also tried to create public opinion against Meria and wrote two influential articles in the *Calcutta Christian Observer*.<sup>22</sup> Brown, like other missionaries, believed that the gospel needed to be preached if the Kui were to abandon the Meria rite. He wrote, "through the breadth of the land shall be spread the knowledge of the Lord, and the terrible *meriah puja* be exchanged for the holy institution of the religion of the Bible and the blessings of civilised life."<sup>23</sup> Brown's personal visit and actions were the very first step towards it.

John Orissa Goadby was the first to come as a missionary to the Kui people. He made regular visits to the hills from a base near the foot-hill town of Russellkonda. He tried to communicate using a translator, a rescued Meria victim. He had realised the importance of communicating with people in their own language and how he described that could not be more clear:

The ability to preach to them in their own native language will be of no mean importance and worth striving for. The words of one's mother-tongue are sweeter to the ear, easier to comprehend, sink deeper, and go nearer to the heart than any in another language, however well acquired. For my own part I am rather partial to it, and shall do my best to understand it thoroughly.<sup>24</sup>

At least in one instance a local Kui woman who had married a Christian in the plains had requested Goadby to go to her people and preach to them.

...a native Christian and his Kondh wife came to see him, fresh from visiting the wife's sister near the ghaut... As the wife was leaving the Goadbys, she said to them: "You must not think that preaching to them once or twice or thrice will be enough. Nor must you be disheartened, if they will not listen nor try to understand. You must preach and pray, preach and pray, and God will give His blessing."<sup>25</sup>

Pearce Carey described a preaching scenario from Goadby's report, with Goadby as the preacher, the Kui as the audience and Jesus the message:

They liked best to gather at night round a fire under a tree, whilst he sat on his wicker stool or on a borrowed cot and talked to them, the men squatting round, and

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torn Kondh hills in the Buddhist missionary's visit to the war scene of Kalinga and the dramatic and high profile conversion of Emperor Asoka. This well known historical episode was made into a Bollywood commercial movie, *Asoka* in 2002.

<sup>22</sup> Brown, William. "Description of the Khunds or Khundas" in *CCO*, April (1837), pp. 157-168 and July 1837, pp. 337-347.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, William, "Description of the Khunds" in *CCO*, July 1837, p. 340.

<sup>24</sup> Carey, Pearce. *Dawn On The Kondh Hills*. London: Carey Press, 1936, p. 35.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

the women and children standing behind them...

...Goadby asked an old man if he had ever heard of the true God, who made the hills and mountains, the Sun and moon and stars. He answered "No: I have thought of such an One, but I have never heard about him." Then he told them that to teach them of Him he was learning their language.

...When the villagers found him talking to them, not in *Oriya*, but in their mother tongue, they even clapped their hands and drew closer... they asked if this Jesus was still on earth, and if so, how many day's journey it would be for him to their country?<sup>26</sup>

People did listen to Goadby with interest as he tried to speak in Kui. The Kui are not passive listeners, seizing any opportunity to engage in animated conversation or argument. A headman, for example, once spoke up "blaming the Christian religion for the suppression of the Meriahs and for the cholera, which had smitten his district".<sup>27</sup> During Goadby's last visit in 1865 "people's interest gave way to suspicion that he and his party were government spies."<sup>28</sup> Goadby was asked by the Mission to move to Cuttack to help in relief work in the Great Famine of 1866: he died a year later.

Twenty six years later Wood, Wilkinson and Long revived the mission. Their work was again mostly oral, preaching and talking to people using Kui which they were still learning. Only Wilkinson made some progress with Kui and went on to translate the Gospel of Mark.<sup>29</sup> Wood died soon after and Long parted company with Wilkinson, with whom he could not get along, and worked in various parts of Orissa. Wilkinson, who later died of fever, toured the hills on horse back or moved with tent and coolies, coming from his base down below. This distant residence and brief visiting was not satisfactory and he was unable to build a rapport with the people. Long returned and continued itinerating and preaching in the hills. As a person Long was friendly and his personal style defied the usual missionary stereotype: "a climb, a cricket-match, a game of chess, a bit of wood craft, a sing-song, some sort of rounders with a Raja, letter writings and personal visits" were what he enjoyed doing with people, says Carey.<sup>30</sup> He was good in Oriya but not in Kui. Yet despite all efforts, the people as a whole remained indifferent to Christian preaching. Long's diary quoted in Carey gives a glimpse of his preaching work.

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<sup>26</sup> Carey, Preace. *Dawn on the Kond Hills*, p. 37.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 38.

<sup>28</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Konds*, 1982, p. 79.

<sup>29</sup> Carey, Pearce. *Dawn on the Kond Hills*, p. 46. Also Boal. *The Konds*, p. 84.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 48.



Jan 19, 1905, Preached in several villages round Udaygiri. Tried to tell something of our Saviour through an interpreter.

Dec. 7, 1906, Preached in Tikabali market, but very few really understand the message in Oriya.

Dec.31, 1906, Decided not to go for another Oriya tour, but to go to Udaygiri and press on with the Kui language.

June.29, 1908. Russellkonda. I have just returned from a place five miles away. I went to the market. But instead of seeing 4000 people there, there was not a soul. In the town close by cholera has been raging and carried off sixty people.<sup>31</sup>

Long came to a realisation that only an indigenous worker could build the necessary bridge for the gospel and help Christianity take root among the Kui. He approached John Biswas, a Telugu speaking student at Cuttack Theological School: Biswas was willing to come. Long died in 1909 and Biswas worked with the missionaries who followed. A permanent mission centre was built in Gudripodi in the hills, despite the high risk of malaria, to enhance regular and better personal contact and communication. Biswas had moved directly to Udaygiri, into a thatched house already built and temporarily used before.

Biswas' Telugu descent helped him to become quickly fluent in Kui. His personal skills of playing the violin and hunting with a gun helped to identify with the people who loved music and hunting. As already stated in page 57 missionary Johnson found Biswas a good 'shikari'. In jungle life encounters between humans and animals are a regular occurrence and the battle between them is a crucial part of existence.<sup>32</sup> Biswas had joined in that battle too and this had helped him to integrate well into the Kui society and became a good friend of theirs.

He made frequent preaching tours, sometimes accompanied by missionaries. The BMS in 1914 reported,

The year 1913 was marked by regular visiting of our schools and evangelism in nearby villages... these schools visited by John Biswas and Mr Evans or me (Millman)...Mr Evans and John Biswas visited 35 villages. Everywhere people listened with interest. The Magic Lantern was valuable asset and large crowds gathered at every Lantern service"<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Carey, Pearce. *Dawn on the Kond Hills*, pp. 49-57.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 84.

<sup>33</sup> *BMS Indian Report: Bengal, Orissa, Northern India and Ceylon For 1914*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1915, pp. 29 and 35.



One of Biswas' friends was Bisi, a Kui priest (*Kutagatanju*) who was also attending the Mission school newly started in the village and acquired the skills of reading. He was reading the Gospel books some of which were given by Biswas. In my interview, senior church leader Paul Pradhan told what many in his village remember about John Biswas; how he encouraged children to go to school, toured villages preaching and talking to people, how his friendship with Bisi and their regular discussion over what Bisi was reading from the books of Luke, John and the *Muktira Marga* (The Way of Salvation) eventually led to the baptism of Bisi and his family.<sup>34</sup> Bisi, his wife Lasuri, their son Bondia and son-in-law Kusu took baptism on the Easter day of 1914. Later, the other son Jongia became Christian. Three months later a respected school teacher named Poto Pradhan (father of Paul above) and his wife also became Christians. These notable first conversions attracted others, mainly the Pans, to Christianity and this 'family pattern' of conversion continued and was to become the hallmark of conversions in the Kondh hills.

It was through Biswas' personal relationship and the trust he enjoyed in the Mallikapodi village that the family of Bisi, the Kui priest, took the first step in conversion. All these adults were now literate and regularly reading the gospel books which no doubt played a very important role as well. Biswas' personal guidance aided in the decision process of these first converts. He earned their trust, was credible and could build the bridge to the Kui for the gospel. Many new converts turned voluntary evangelists or witnesses of the faith, including Bisi the ex-priest. The decision for conversion was theirs, taken in their own time, and generated the spontaneous desire to speak about it and influence others. Among the early converts a number of them were school teachers, educated and trained by the Mission. This was the most active and successful group of workers who helped in church services and witnessed to the gospel in their sphere of work and in villages where they went to live as government school teachers. The Kui message-bearers—men, women, paid or voluntary and school teachers—became the voice of the Gospel from within the community. In their own ways they presented their new faith, often in stories around events leading to conversion, or reading from the gospel books. Through persuasion, opinion or argument, the diffusion of the gospel in the community took place.

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<sup>34</sup> Interview, # 42. Pradhan had been the president of the Kondh Hill's District Church Union for many years.

## 2. The Impact

The three years of Goadby were under the fading shadows of recent Meria suppression. His communication mainly through interpreters, his visits limited to annual winter seasons and his departure after three years meant little headway was made. Wilkinson and Long were often struck down by sickness from repeated attacks of malaria to which the European was particularly vulnerable,<sup>35</sup> their contact was further limited by having to come up from the plains. Travelling with tent, chairs, tables, gadgets, camp followers and interpreter, the missionary image was inseparable from that of the government Sahibs. For that and other reasons Christianity remained alien to the Kui. The early missionaries did attempt to learn Kui and made regular preaching visits but only after they moved to the hills and lived there continuously. They saw the break through in conversion only after utilising John Biswas as evangelist

In the early phase of the Mission the ground work was laid by personal contact, the 'seed' of Christianity was scattered in the preaching, in the translation of the gospel and through the beginning of Kui medium Mission schools. This was the beginning of a new encounter when the Kui hearer or reader came across the new Christian message and ideas. In this early encounter Millman's Kui schools and the person and friendship of John Biswas were vital points of contact for the people. Recruiting promising converts as evangelists contact was further extended and the outreach was further expanded.

By 1930, and by personal contact the church had reached a membership of 400 baptised Kui, many more being learners or seekers, meeting in sixteen centres and mostly from the Pan community. Three full time evangelists were appointed and Sunday services were led by school teachers and missionaries.<sup>36</sup>

During these years the church grew spontaneously. One after another, schoolboys brought their parents; isolated Christians brought groups; groups brought their relatives. Many new areas were opened up by Millman's ex-schoolboys.<sup>37</sup>

Between the two World Wars the mission expanded and the number of overseas missionaries was at its highest. But the indigenous mission workers

<sup>35</sup> Wilkinson opined, "There is not much hope of Europeans being able to live long together in these hills." Long too wanted Russellkonda as the centre for Kui Mission for "His own experience of Hill Tracts' fevers had been so frequent and distressing." Carey, Pearce. *Dawn on the Kond Hills*, p. 60.

<sup>36</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Church in The Kond Hills*. Nagpur: NCCI, 1963, p. 61.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

increased even more in number and included the school teachers, hospital staff, Bible women, evangelists, pastors and many lay workers; together they took the work further into interior areas. The Pan community making the land available for a mission bungalow showed their willingness for missionaries to move to their midst. And the missionary move showed their intention to live among them. Grimes, Horsburgh, Millman and Evans led in this move and John Biswas proved to be most useful instrument for the mission with his skills and ability to blend into the Kui community. All these men, with their wives as part of the mission team working alongside them, learned the language and were involved in the community trying to reach out to all sections: men, women and children.

### C. The Indigenous Message-Bearers: Speaking to the Heart

The spoken word in mission communication needs to be examined in the above setting discussed thus far. In the conversion movement person to person oral contact was the common form of evangelism. The Kui in general heard the gospel from their fellow Kui, relatives and friends speaking and persuading their own people. The indigenous message-bearers contextualised the gospel to their own need and created their own rhetoric of the gospel to be intelligible to their hearers. The mission in mother-tongue had the advantage not only in the diffusion of the gospel message but also in the internalisation of the same. The Pastor's word in prayer was regarded as having the same or an even more powerful effect than that of the Kui priest against the hostile spirits causing sickness, to cast them out or render them incapable, and healing.

In the following section I focus on the spoken modes that carried the Christian message such as in preaching, praying, counselling, teaching, telling personal stories, singing and paying visits, and personal presence establishing relationship. One early incident of a personal and close encounter of a few Kui men with missionary Evans in an unusual situation led to some conversion with significant implication for the infant Kui church.

#### 1. Bonding: World War, Exposure and Conversion

The Kui involvement in the First World War at the British frontier in far away Basra of Mesopotamia (today's Iraq) may seem strange but this was a unique experience of personal encounter with Christianity by the Kui young men who went there. The War roped in even the Kui men and Kondh hills' missionaries. Evans was

asked in 1917 to form and accompany a Kui Labour Corps to work in the army camps in Basra. Of the 3116 men who went there most were Kui young men, some ex-Mission school boys and some who had never left the village beyond walking distance. In Basra, in their loneliness, amid battle anxiety and mysteries of life in the alien land, Evans was the only familiar person to encourage and keep company with them. He preached in the army camp on Sundays and some weekdays at services which the Kui boys also attended. While in Basra some men showed an interest in the gospel and even asked for Kui gospel books to be sent from Udaygiri. After returning home in 1919 a number of these men became Christian.

Basra was a tremendous exposure to the wider world far beyond their traditional village boundary. This crossing of boundaries was challenging to their worldview and affected the hold of their traditional beliefs on them. The unusual situation thrust upon both the missionary and the Kui men helped them forge a closer personal relationship which led to their exposure to, and interest in, Christian faith. The conversion of many of them proved to be a significant phase in the life of the church as these young men, educated in the Mission school and as ones who had 'seen the world', provided educated and able leadership to the new church.<sup>38</sup>

## 2. Preaching: The Missionary and Indigenous Kui

For the early mission preaching was the central mission work and western missionaries made tours of villages with Bibles in hand, preaching to people where ever they could. For people one of the common sources of hearing the Christian gospel was through preaching and personal sharing by the evangelists. Missionaries had their own method and style and made regular preaching tours. Missionary preaching tours were familiar sights during the early years. Once the Kui church came into being the new converts were trained to be preachers. Preaching was the conventional method of the mission and a primary way of speaking about and spreading the gospel. Village gatherings such as the market places and gathering villagers on the village street were suitable for open preaching. To the Kui people such public religious preaching was new and its content not familiar.

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<sup>38</sup> In another context, many Kui workers who went to work in Assam tea gardens or elsewhere brought home the urban influences of monetary life-style, luxury goods and new ideas that affected their old life-style if not the beliefs. See Mojumdar, K. *The Changing Tribal Life in British Orissa*. New Delhi: Kavery Books, 1998, pp. 123 and 127.

a. **The Missionary.** A senior Kui church leader recounted to me humorously how he had completely misunderstood what missionary Evans had preached in his village many years ago when he was a young boy and in his first encounter with Christian preaching.

At the end of his preaching Evans Saheb lifted his hand and I heard him saying, "this seed I am sowing in your midst today and it will surely bear fruit." I became curious to know what kind of seed and why he sowed it in our street. After the crowd became thin I went slyly to the spot where he stood and searched the grass for the seeds. I found nothing. Our village schoolteacher was a Christian and we knew they were Saheb's men. So I later asked him about this. Then he told me the meaning and also gave me a New Testament. This teacher made me a Christian later.<sup>39</sup>

In this particular event the sight of the missionary in his vehicle accompanied by a few others was a novelty to village folks and a memorable event. But the content or subject of most such typical preaching remained foreign. Here the metaphor of seed for the 'Word of God' was common to missionary language but alien to Kui listeners who did not have a concept of a written sacred text as seed, taking root or bearing fruit. The written scripture and its contents were to the missionary the foundation of his faith and the message which he had come to share but the message which this listener and possibly others like him perceived was entirely different from what was intended by the preacher. However, it aroused some curiosity and a further enquiry for the full meaning of the Sahib's words.

Missionary preaching emphasised Biblical and doctrinal accuracy and exposition of the Scripture text.<sup>40</sup> They also trained the Mission's evangelists in Biblical preaching. The Missionary method of evangelism emphasised the logical or organised presentation of the Christian gospel without diluting the doctrinal aspects such as the authority of the Word of God and the Saviourhood of Jesus Christ. In the task of evangelism the emphasis was on personal contact, focus on individuals, clarity and presentation of the whole gospel. Below I quote from one of the guidelines provided by missionaries to the evangelists. Some of its salient features read as follows and the evangelism training for the workers was based on these principles:<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Interview # 7.

<sup>40</sup> Sermon notes of Raymond Lewis who was involved in training in evangelism and reaching include subjects like the OT Prophets, Stewardship, Bible characters and textual preaching.

<sup>41</sup> Henry, Bruce. "Suggestions For Effective Gospel Witness". Cyclostyled pages, c1950s.



1. In all your witness represent Christ as LORD AND SAVIOUR OF THE WHOLE WORLD. Preach Christ,--not Christianity or a Church.
2. Nevertheless remember that the Gospel of salvation, God's message to mankind, has many aspects. Preach the whole Gospel, as taught us in the whole Word of God,-- but not necessarily all on one occasion!
3. Your own personal experience of Christ is a valuable and powerful witness to Him. Therefore give your own testimony as opportunity affords; and even in this remember that you should be pointing to Christ rather than to yourself.
4. Expounding Bible passages and stories affords many opportunities of Gospel witness.
5. Emphasise always that your message is based on the AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE, God's Word to mankind. The Gospel is not a collection of human ideas, but GOOD NEWS given to us by God in his mercy.

The six areas to focus during the operation:

1. The People you are serving
2. The Message you take
3. The Way You Take the Message
4. Concerning You Yourself
5. How to make the most of Opportunities
6. What to Avoid

The nine important points to be kept in mind and practised:

1. Pray before, during and after your witness.
2. Personal talks with single individuals achieve more.
3. Singing is an excellent means and people appreciate it.
4. Always carry good literature--Christian literature with Gospel emphasis.
5. In preaching BE BRIEF AND TO THE POINT. Avoid rambling.
6. Know your message well
7. Concentrate attention on few places which show promise of response.
8. Use simple, everyday illustrations.
9. Use simple aids of teaching, e.g., Flannel-graphs, coloured pictures, film strips.

These principles were sound and the manual was a good guideline for personal organisation but it was from a non-tribal perspective, indeed we might say it relied on a shared way of thinking between missionary and the listener. It followed the logical and organised thoughts of the missionary but people did not find logical, abstract and doctrinal ideas of any relevance at all for their lives, or their decision making. The missionary emphasis was on sin, salvation, Christ as Lord and Saviour, the authority of the Scripture, the Great creator God or other ideas, and they formed the central tenets of missionary message which they also taught the evangelists to preach. The Kui knew about the gods to whom not only all their forests, mountains, streams or cattle belonged but who also lived in them: they were not looking for a

new theology or set of abstract doctrines. One thing they were looking for was an answer to their daily predicaments of sicknesses, high mortality, food security or the burdens of sacrifices. The written Word of God or the Holy Scripture per se did not grip the listeners. However, spoken stories from the gospel about Jesus, the stories of his compassion and miracles, of casting out demons and spirits, his death as sacrifice, the blood shed for the benefit of all people and his name having power in prayer; these things could be readily understood and related to by the hearers. This was the mission strategy of fellow Kui who were now Christians who knew better ways to tackling these pressing problems, through their stories and actions adapted to Christian ideas and Christian stories adapted to the Kui context.

Missionaries themselves were acutely aware of the conceptual gulf and the socio-cultural distance from the people among whom they were working. Missionary preaching became limited to church services and to special occasions. In later years the missionary role was more of administrative, advisory, teaching and in the medical profession. However, missionaries continued preaching in the church services and during special meetings.

b. The Indigenous Kui. Kui Pastors, evangelists, school teachers, able lay leaders and hospital workers were the ones who did most of the preaching work. The actual preaching force engaged in the frontiers of the mission was these converts turned preachers who did the major work of preaching in village outreach and among people outside the church. Traditionally the Pans had been village messengers, running the errands of the headman or the community. In the conversion movement they had a major role in evangelism, travelling to villages and preaching. The evangelists' work was not limited by education or special qualification. They all confessed to a calling to ministry, showing dedication and zeal in their work.

One educated and outstanding woman leader of the Diocese described to me her father's work as an evangelist whom she claimed as her inspiration for ministry.

My father was illiterate but he had memorised many Bible verses. He was a regular preacher at the market place and he was the first Pastor of the Raikia Church. He used to go to weekly markets and preach the Christian message. He would spread his towel on the ground and place his open Bible on it. That's all. He could not read himself. But he would preach. People visit these weekly markets from far away places and that's how he preached to others.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Interview # 41.

Most evangelists had very limited literacy or like my interviewee's father nothing at all. But these went out as evangelists and such preachings were a common method of their work besides the more frequent methods of visits and personal chatting. The open Bible here signified the authority of the word he preached. The authority of the spoken word was drawn from the written 'Word of God'. There was a special emphasis in the Baptist Mission on the written scripture of the Bible. In preaching, Kui evangelists operated at the same level as their listeners, the vocabulary and idiom were familiar to both. They drew parallels and made comparisons of Biblical stories with their own tradition and situation, known to both.

Just as when you want water in the rice field, you push it from another, through the bank and down into the next, so God gathered all the water into one place and called it sea. All this world, fields, trees, mango trees, rice, other grains and fruits, hills, valleys, all this He has made and given to us.<sup>43</sup>

One of my longest interviews was with an evangelist who just loved to go on telling his work experiences. When I asked what he preached the description was long. I quote few sentences,

I preached the miracles of Jesus. How in becoming Christian one gets peace, joy, happiness and satisfaction. ...The liquor, sacrifice and spirit worship are not useful. The Jaani wants to eat the chicken so he asks to sacrifice. I used to have my own liquor business, why I stopped that...What is the use of worshipping 22 different gods. Bible says God is one and he created everything...He came bearing the name Jesus...He raised the dead, healed the sick, gave eyes to the blind and finally gave his life. It was a sacrifice and his blood was for cleansing the sins of mankind...He has resurrected from the tomb. He is a living God. All those who believe him they all will get life even if they die in bodily.<sup>44</sup>

Preaching by indigenous Christians took its own form and mixed with elements taught by missionaries or learned in the Bible school by those few trained there. However, village preaching or village evangelism was mostly in the hands of these Christians. Some Pastors and preachers did imitate the missionary or some senior Oriya preachers, but the majority of them were without formal training and were barefoot evangelists. They went around telling their own stories and stories of the Bible or church as they understood them. But more importantly they talked about

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<sup>43</sup> Windsor, B. "Preaching the Gospel in a Kui Village" in *Baptist Missionary Herald*, September 1965, p. 138.

<sup>44</sup> Interview # 6

what their listeners were interested to hear. They knew what their audience wanted, not just what Christian doctrine they ought to know, and articulated that message.

Missionaries wanted to see more 'Biblical' preaching. "Non-Biblical stories are a major feature in the sermons of certain lay preachers, and there has been over the years a dearth of simple Biblical exposition." remarked Boal while commenting on church preaching.<sup>45</sup> She observed that preaching in the older churches had become stereotyped and was falling into the pattern of traditional church preaching which was dull and ritualised. She also stressed that some leading lay members were able preachers and preached forcefully.

However, preaching outside the church was more unconventional, supplemented with book sales and distribution or followed by personal counselling or answering questions of individuals or giving further information and telling of personal experiences, as the situation might arise. Sermons or talks were also given in house meetings conducted in Christian houses attended by interested or curious neighbours.

During the conversion movement which took place after most missionaries had left, a special team of evangelists was formed by an able Kui evangelist trained in Serampore Theological College. It was named *Aragati* (forward movement) consisting of young Kui volunteers and it used creative ways to evangelise. *Aragati* was specially formed to spearhead evangelistic work after being encouraged by the overwhelming response in conversion. It was a preaching team led and participated in by Kui Christian volunteers and pressed into work in areas outside Christian concentrations.

I organised some enthusiastic youths and started a team which we called *Aragati*. We used preaching aids to attract people. Magic Lantern was in use already. We used pictures on flannel board and also some puppets. We went in group and our team attracted village people. I trained them in street drama, we performed the Bartimaeus story, the miracle healing of the blind by Jesus. We repeated it in many places and our drama was quite popular. Some villages invited us again and again. We performed to gather the villagers in large numbers and preached briefly. Yes, we also had musical instruments, Harmonium and Tabla, and Petromax light for night time preaching. *Aragati's* work has led to many conversions. The Gosukia and Gundhani villages, for example, became Christian after we went there.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Church in the Kond Hills*, pp. 88-91.

<sup>46</sup> Interview # 40.

The method, the message and the meaning of the message rested with the indigenous evangelists. However, preaching was a conventional Christian practice and method of spreading the gospel but that was not the Kui way of receiving messages. Preaching did not often successfully introduce Christianity. The innovation of the *Aragati* was in conversation and informal verbal chat as the core method of evangelism.

### 3. Sharing Conversion Stories or Chatting Christianity

Informal 'religious' communication was common and it was through sharing the teachings or stories of the gospel or chatting conversion stories of one's own or of other persons and villages. The personally recounted stories of Christian teaching, personal examples of becoming Christian and testimony to its benefits were potentially influential and effective in communication. Sharing information, ideas and experiences on matters of the new Christian faith was rather more frequent. Evangelists visited village to village and a spontaneous gathering or meeting of people in a house or outside could be formed where such 'personal evangelism' took place. This took place among equals, friends and with accents and idioms of such conversations striking a chord immediately. Generally the evangelists were known to most people or they were from nearby areas; some were even a near or distant relative. Presenting the Christian gospel in such informal talks was free from the doubts, mistrusts or suspicion which easily come in talks with strangers. The ideas presented may or may not have seemed useful or relevant to Kui, but the motives of the speaker were not in doubt. The life and background of the Popka or the evangelist was generally known to them. Communication was horizontal and empathetic.

One frequent occurrence was that some village people themselves would first discuss the incident of conversions in a nearby village or a family or families of their own village. Discuss its reasons and merits then send a party to a known Pastor or to an older Christian village expressing their desire to become Christian. Sometimes a sickness, or a suggestion of a friend or the pressure of a Christian convert in the family, mainly by marriage, would trigger such a discussion and the decision would be made to become Christian.

The suggestion would be made directly, offering to 'get hold of Christian dharma' and 'let go the *pujas*'. The idea of becoming Christian was in the disposing of the spirit objects, getting free from the Jaani's services and stopping sacrifices.



The decision for action in conversion came after mutual discussions or following the action or lead of a nearby village or relatives in the village. The ultimate meaning of Christianity and conversion was made by the Kui themselves. After listening to their own people and observing the converts for some time the decision would be made to convert. The concepts and concerns dominating the decision were often far removed from the central teachings and emphasis of the mission and its official doctrines.

The Popka from Pokari village came and told us to become Christian. His name was Jhadu. He and Donenga both were Popkas and they told let us get hold of Christian religion. Our fathers died in doing puja. But we will know the Lord. You take hold of our Christian religion. We called all the people here and told why not we become Christian. So all devta was removed from the houses. He cut our hair. He said you are now Christian. (Just like that, he told and you agreed without thinking?). No, nothing to think. It was good for us. We became better, no puja to do.<sup>47</sup>

All those Popkas came and told us, 'you have been sacrificing all the time, any benefit? You become Christian. Your money is being wasted'. We realised yes, we are dying but doing puja. Lots of money is wasted and still life is wasted.<sup>48</sup>

The people were always interested in getting hold of some thing that was good for them, their family and community. They were more influenced by the common good and wellbeing of persons rather than individual personal benefit. There are few instances of an individual or a family taking the first step without being accompanied by others. Belonging and holding onto or adhering to was the chief meaning of life in the village.

In that sense conversion meant a way of better life, that which is chosen by relatives and neighbours. It is better to belong to others than to stay aloof when they are becoming Christians.

The strengths of the Pastor/evangelists were their personal contact, relationships and counselling in their work. They also communicated a new confidence and questioned the power of the Jaani, the efficacy of his rituals, contrasting it with Christianity and claiming its benefits in every day life and the problems they faced together. They said that conversion is relief from the burden of sacrifices, that it would save their men from drinking and that the infants of Christians had a better chance of surviving. The ways of the Pans have changed with

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<sup>47</sup> Interview # 20.

<sup>48</sup> Interview # 36.

education and jobs. The conversion conversation often dominated these topics. But some also talk about “Jesus died for us and he gave his blood. Because we don’t know that we are worshipping the mountains or the stones and trees...This is what exactly the Pastor told us” claimed one convert.<sup>49</sup> Blood was the familiar aspect of Kui ritual and it was emphasised in Christian evangelism describing Christ’s death and its benefits for all.

#### 4. Teaching: Teacher-Evangelists

The Christian school teachers had an important role as teachers of the Bible also. Some of the earliest converts were Mission school students and after receiving primary education they could become teachers in government schools in scattered areas. They had their Bible and hymn book in the schools where they worked and spoke from them to the people. They worked as school teachers in places where they were the only educated Christians among totally non-literate church members. Some teachers brought the gospel for the first time to those areas. Secondly they helped the church in leading the Sunday services in Kui, in administration and in preaching, some times walking miles to Christian villages.

The Quinquennial Report 1932-36, of the BMS reporting about the significant work done by these teacher-evangelists said,

The Union is not entirely dependent upon its (paid) evangelists for the spread of the Gospel--there is a fine band of young men, mostly Mission School teachers, who are willing to walk miles on a Sunday to take services in distant churches...As a result of two Government teachers going to Baliguda, some 40 miles from our Centre, there is now a number of enquiries there who are putting up a house for an evangelist.<sup>50</sup>

Of the twelve paid evangelists and two teacher-evangelists employed by the Mission, the Central Church Council supported two and all others were supported by the Kui themselves.<sup>51</sup> Most teachers worked voluntarily for evangelism or as teachers of the Bible. These teachers opened up many new areas as they went to live and work in isolated government primary schools. Their evenings and weekends were spent in fostering the growth of new groups and linking them to the mission centre.<sup>52</sup> The names of many school teachers who were cited for their role in mission introduced

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<sup>49</sup> Interview # p. 23.

<sup>50</sup> *Quinquennial Report 1932-36 of the BMS and the Associated Baptist Church Organisations in Bengal, Orissa, North India and Lushai Hills*. Cuttack: Orissa Mission Press, 1937, p. 69.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69

<sup>52</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Church in the Kondh Hills*, p. 62.

the Bible and Christian message to their students and in the villages in which they went to live.<sup>53</sup> For one convert “Our village school teacher was a Christian...This teacher made me a Christian later.”<sup>54</sup> Another referred to his headmaster who gave his Bible to read and counselled him from the Bible when he was depressed at the death of his younger brother:

One Christian teacher came to our Tumudibandha school as the Headmaster. He used to read the Bible. I got to read the Bible from him. He also taught us Christian songs. When I passed my 5<sup>th</sup> class I took baptism and became a Christian.”<sup>55</sup>

Such teachers were the only Christians in those areas and they were the first sources of contact for the Christian gospel. Often they would be the only educated persons among the people. They commanded some authority and respect and they were the source of news and views and important information to the people.

The teachers in rural areas are generally respected and also approached for advice, information or opinion on issues facing the village. People also ask them for help in reading or writing, for example, a personal letter, a pamphlet, a court notice etc. From this vantage position teachers can also talk about the gospel or read to them. For many converts Christian teachers of their village school were the first Christian contact and presence in their area. Some teachers’ educational reputation and respect among the students and villagers influenced the Christian message they shared with them.

So the teachers conducted Sunday services sometimes walking miles to different villages. They played an important role in the growing and mostly non-literate Church giving the needed leadership in pastoral and administrative duties.

## 5. Praying: Power of the Spoken Word

Prayers might be a common practice in mission and church, a Christian devotional custom, and all Christians were expected to pray in certain ways, in the name of Jesus or saying the Lord’s Prayer or spontaneously. However, in the context of evangelism and the conversion movement and within the context of the Kui belief system, often prayers were used as spoken words of spiritual power for healing from

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<sup>53</sup> Interview # 10. Among the many Kui Christian teachers some names cited to me are:

1. Poto Pradhan, 2. Radhakrishna Naik, 3. Satrugana Naik, 4. Lokanatha Pradhan, 5. Dutia Pradhan, 6. Mukunda Naik, 7. Jagannatha Naik, 8. Gajapati Naik, 9. Biswanatha Naik, 10. Dhanial Mallick, 11. Anam Chandra Naik. This is by no means an exhaustive list.

<sup>54</sup> Interview # 26.

<sup>55</sup> Interview # 26.

sickness and against the spirits, unpredictable and often hostile. The prayers were spontaneous spoken words or combined with words from the Bible and claimed the power of the name of Jesus. Prayer for healing or exorcism or confronting the spirits now disfavoured, was a spiritual power encounter. Prayers were sometimes combined with the reading of the Bible. The words of the Bible read-out and the spoken words of prayer together formed a formidable force in prayer. Dr Stanley Thomas of the Moorshed Mission hospital with years of experience noted that one common reason for conversion in remote areas in the early days was healing in the name of Jesus.<sup>56</sup> The Popkas or Pastors offered to pray in sickness or assured protection through prayer against the displeased or hostile spirits. From the people, they also sought the Popka's help to become Christian, which sometimes involved disposing of the spirit objects through his prayer.

Where the Jaani or Kutagatanju had failed to cure or protect against the sicknesses or misfortunes and the Popka's prayer was sought and it helped in recovery, the power of prayer became starker in the eyes or experience of the persons involved. Where Christian prayer successfully replaced Kui ritual (consisting of the Jaani's words and actions) in times of sickness or in crisis situations it undermined the Jaani's power. Considering the office and function of the Jaani which claimed access to and control of the less visible world, the intervention of prayer in his local domain demonstrated the considerable power of the new way to the people. Elwin described the priest of the neighbouring Soura tribe:

He has the power not only to diagnose the source of trouble or diseases, but to cure it. He is doctor as well as priest, psychologist as well as magician, the repository of tradition, the source of sacred knowledge. His primary duty is that of divination; in case of sickness he seeks the cause in trance or dream.<sup>57</sup>

The Kondh priest held an even more superior position because of his tradition of human sacrifice which was considered 'solemn and important' by neighbouring tribes though not practiced by them. Prayer, if effective, undermined the prerogative of the Jaani and weakened the hold of belief in the power of his words. The public disposal of the spirit objects appeased and acknowledged for their power and control over the household or family, reconfirmed the power claimed in prayer. These objects were replaced by the Bible or Christian written texts and Christian rituals or

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<sup>56</sup> Thomas, Stanley. *Journey Into Wholeness*. Derby: Moorley's Publishing, 1994.

<sup>57</sup> Elwin, Verrier. *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*. Bombay: OUP, 1955, p. 130.

devotional activities including prayer, singing, reading/listening to the words of the Bible, preaching and sometimes with the Eucharist.

Prayers formed an integral part of the spoken Christian communication. All pastors and Christian workers learned or taught and were accustomed to pray in their personal life and in their work, especially for people. Evangelists/Pastors claimed results or miracles through their prayer. Interview responses, from the evangelists and the converts alike, were spontaneous in claiming the power of prayer. One retired evangelist with years of experience narrated three incidents from his ministry:

We arrived in this village on our preaching tour and in the evening people talked to us about the drought situation. It was hot and dry season for a long time. There was no rain. "All are dying" they said, "if you want you can pray." So we three sat down to pray. The villagers gathered around us, a big crowd. That night there was a heavy rain. Knee deep water on the road. The rats came out of their hole and entered houses. My aunty in that village, she is rich. She was going to hit and kill one rat entering her house but I told her don't kill them. It is by the Lord's command things have happened...the following day about sixty household became Christian...

A fellow was putting a thatch on his house. Something happened, his hand became stiff. He could not move his hand. People had to carry him down. They sent for us to come and pray for him. We went and prayed and he became fine...

A mother fell down near the well and became unconscious. We prayed and healed her. She woke up and she was OK.<sup>58</sup>

To this interviewee each of these above incidents is remembered as a moment of miracle and an answer to prayer. Christians offered to pray in times of trouble or crisis for their friends and neighbours as they also prayed for themselves. They also testified to healing or miracles through prayer. It might look a natural process of rain at the end of the summer season or the nature of the above two physical problems and their healings might also appear natural, but, from a believer's perspective it is by prayer in the name of Jesus and according to his will that such answers could be received. To the Kui people it was necessary to sacrifice or conduct proper rituals for a good rain and similarly for cure from ailments and therefore the much needed rain and crucial healing by prayer was seen as results of successful Christian ritual.

Prayer for healing was also commonly used by evangelists. Sickness was a major problem faced by people in the hills and besides the hospital team of visiting doctors and nurses, the pastors and evangelists were also often asked to tackle the problem. So praying over the sick was common to the ministry of the Pastors. In a

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<sup>58</sup> Interview # 1.



long conversation narrating many events of his Christian ministry this evangelist told one incident when a mother and her family became Christian due to the experience of her children's recovery from fever.<sup>59</sup> Another instance of conversion was cited due to the healing through prayer.

My elder brother's wife was from a Christian family, from our relatives who had become Christian. She was promised to be given in marriage to our family by her parents. That's how she had married to my brother. She fell sick with pain in her stomach. We did our own medicine and mainly our priest's treatment which was spirit craft. But was no use. She said I am a Christian, call my parents, they will pray and I will be OK. We called her parents to pray. They did and she recovered. We became interested in prayer. Her father brought Pastor Naik to our house. They also kept visiting us and prayed in our house. Then I accepted Christianity.<sup>60</sup>

In a regular and systematic way prayer for healing was practiced in the ministry of the hospital. Prayers for the patients were a part of the medical service along with its medicines and treatments. The hospital ministry was a major arm of the Mission work and we shall look at it separately in a later chapter.

Prayer for protection from dangerous and violent spirits was another common use. One person's testimony of the conversion of his family involves getting free from the ghost which the villagers accused him of harbouring in his house and whose spirit was attacking the villagers with fever. He and his family wanted to get free from it and from the accusation of their fellow villagers.

My mother was going to call the Jaani to come and cast out the ghost from our house. On the way she met the pastor. He stopped and talked to my mother. He came to know that my mother was going to the Jaani. The pastor said no need of the Jaani, he himself can come and do it. "If there is an evil spirit it would leave" he said. He came and all that he did was pray and then asked us to throw away the things we were worshipping. We decided to become Christian and after two month we were given baptism.<sup>61</sup>

The Kui acutely felt and strongly believed the control of spirits in every day life. Even converted Christians were not completely free from this belief and continued to have a fear of or respect for the lurking danger from these spirits. But Christians knew that prayers made in the name of Jesus and especially by some pastors known to them could exorcise and control these spirits. "Power encounter was a common and powerful phenomenon of the conversion movement" said one

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<sup>59</sup> Interview # 6.

<sup>60</sup> Interview # 11.

<sup>61</sup> Interview # 3.

senior woman leader and now one of the Area Superintendents.<sup>62</sup>

## 6. Singing and Music: Striking a Chord

Songs, music and dance during special seasons or at festivals are a vital part of Kui tribal life like many or all other tribes of India.<sup>63</sup> They have their own indigenous forms of musical instruments. These include two basic forms of musical instruments. One is the most ancient *Deka*, a gourd-resonated stringed instrument and the common drum. Boal, following Popley, believed the *Deka* was the vernacular instrument of the Kondh tribals.<sup>64</sup> With the introduction of modern instruments many of the tribal music and instruments have gone out of use. Christianity too did not help to preserve the tribal music. One younger generation missionary, Bruce Henry, lamented the drum, which was in his early years very much part of the Kui life of leisure and celebrations, being despised by Christians and falling into disuse.

However, Christian songs were composed and written down for use in the church worship. The song of the Kui which was impromptu and oral found a new image in Christian hymns and songs composed and compiled into the hymn book and made available to all. It was not surprising that both Christian and non-Christian were familiar and fond of singing these hymns and songs. Next to the New Testament, *Puni Saja* the Kui Hymn Book, *Penu Gadi*, was first compiled by 1923. Kui Christians, like teacher Mukunda Naik, wrote a number of hymns, one opening hymn was by John Biswas and a number of hymns were by the missionaries, such as Helen Evans, Stanley Thomas, Bruce Henry and others. The regular singing in the church service was attractive to others. Christians at Christmas, in marriages and from time to time performed singing and drama and the church also brought some modern Oriya music into its worship. These have been attractive but in the course of this the traditional music and songs of the Kui—the Pan and the Kondh alike—have been lost following conversion to Christianity. Recently the Pan drum has been revived to some extent, and it is played during some special occasions such as Christian processions and festivals.

Dhall observed that songs and poetry were much in use by missionaries in other parts of Orissa because Oriya people were accustomed to it in their religious

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<sup>62</sup> Interview # 41.

<sup>63</sup> See Mahapatra, S. *Forgive the Words: Poetry in the Life of the Kondhs...* Cal: United Writer, 1978.

<sup>64</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Kondhs*, p. 215.

tradition and celebrations. "Christian poetry (song) in the Oriya language was a successful media in preaching. In Orissa people were accustomed to hearing songs in village fairs and gatherings in the temple premises."<sup>65</sup> During the conversion movement songs and music were very much a part of the mission of the church. Songs and music in gospel preaching, in special meetings, in Christian festivals and in church services were attractive features for the converts who could participate and express emotion and feelings in large numbers and were enthusiastic about their new change. Music and song in many churches remains an attractive part of the service.

## Conclusion

Most converts testify that it was personal influence of pastors or neighbours through personal sharing and involvement which motivated or convinced them. In Kui spoken society, personal word of mouth determined quality human relationship. Personal contact and spoken word communicated ideas to bring realistic change.

The gospel message was shared by people genuinely interested in their neighbour's life. It came in the language of the people and was expressed in ways which were interesting and understandable. The message or story was introduced by people known or of their own and therefore the source of the message could be trusted. The communication in the vernacular, through their own people and personally spoken ensured the credibility of the message communicated.

The spoken word was dynamic and had power, to affect even the unseen spirits and touch human lives in various ways. The spoken Christian prayer in the name of Jesus and with words from the Bible was believed to have power to heal sickness. Prayer demonstrated power against hostile spirits in acts of exorcism. The zeal and enthusiasm of the Kui evangelists and Christian volunteers and communication through the mother-tongue directly contrasted with the reluctance and indifference of most outsider Oriya government officers entrusted to tribal development and their failure to learn the Kui language. While the Kui always remained suspicious of the outside message, the Christian message was a voice from within the community, it was acceptable and initiated action in conversion.

The message communicated was often the understanding and interpretation of the presenter, and in terms and in ways intelligible to their own people. They knew their audience better than any other, created their own rhetoric of the gospel and they could speak what is relevant or what interested their own people.

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<sup>65</sup> Dhall, Manjusri. *The British Rule*, p. 211.

## Chapter Four

### The Written Word in Gospel Communication

*“It is written in the Bible so we believe it”* Convert

#### Introduction

The introduction of writing into Kui society was a British and western missionary initiative, and in form and content what the Kui first read in their own language was almost entirely Christian. The Baptist policy of Bible translation, printing books in Kui language, plus their Kui vernacular education initiative helped the gospel communication through the written word. The books, written materials and chiefly the Bible, mainly New Testament (*Puni Saja*), played an important role in the Christianization process.

In the subaltern context, writing and literacy have come to be viewed as accessing an elite instrument of the dominant. Ajay Skariya produced examples from the tribal and peasant rebellions in North India that writing was “often both appropriated and destroyed...evidently fuelled by the perception that it was enormously powerful.”<sup>1</sup> He asserted that “The assumption that literacy was characteristic of ‘civilised society’ became commonsensical with the colonial domination and was systematised.”<sup>2</sup> It is significant to find a parallel story in Kogera Pradhan, one of the students of Millman’s first school (started in 1910) and son of a Kondh priest, who used his new skill to write down the elaborate Kondh sacrificial rituals, all of immense importance to the Kondhs. Kogera, who never became Christian, was helping his teacher Millman in the Gospel translation of Luke and John. His transcription of the Kondh ritual text may have been intended to have an authoritative text of Kondh rituals which earlier had required no writing.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> He gives the example of the Santal rebellion of 1885 in which its leader, Sido, claimed the decision to launch the insurrection had been prompted by divine writing on half a piece of paper that fell on his head. Or how, during the 1857 revolt in Hamirpur, UP, crowds attacked and destroyed all written records of every kind. See Skariya, Ajay “Writing Orality and Power in the Dangs, Western India, 1800s—1920s” in Amin, S and Chakrabarty, D (Ed). *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asia History and Society*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Kogera Pradhan was involved helping Oliver Millman in the gospel translations of Luke and John. But he did not convert to Christianity.

Apart from Captain Frye's initial initiatives, it was the missionaries, starting from Wilkinson in 1892, who produced almost all the writings that appeared in the Kui language. The written word was relatively unfamiliar to the Kui. The Mission, however, regarded the written word as the appropriate medium for gospel communication, despite a very low level of literacy. Many books were printed and distributed and writing and books became a tribal assertion of right to status enjoyed by those having a written language. In the conversion movement the Bible came to be regarded as a central symbol of Christianity and also an object of power, a god-object. For many converts in remote areas a Bible replaced their spirit-objects; merely possessing a Bible identified one as Christian.

In this chapter first I discuss the emphasis of Bible translation and print media in the Baptist mission, which was the basis of the mission's zealous promotion of it even among the oral and non-literate societies. Then I trace writing/translation/print in the Kui language and its role in gospel communication. Communication in written Kui was confined to the Kui Christians only and no attention of researchers has yet been paid to its role in the wider Kui community. I examine the gospel communication through the written/print medium and its impact on a people among whom the literacy rate remained quite low.

## A. The Bible and Written Word in Gospel Communication

### 1. In Protestant and Serampore Baptist Mission

Christianity in general is regarded as the religion of the Book, and the sacred Scriptures of the world religions are the embodiment of the meta-narrative they proclaim. Those written texts are the defining documents of these religions. Martin E Marty observes,

Wherever religion exists in a postprimitive, literate society, it survives in no small measure as an extension of texts, Sacred Scriptures, or a particular book... Thus the Hindu Scriptures are made up of the canon of the Veda... Better known in the West is the obsessive regard shown the Quran by the Muslims... Christianity stands with these religions...<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Marty, Martin E. *Protestantism*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972, p. 115.



Marty's *Protestantism*, in the influential *History of Religions* series, devotes a prominent chapter entitled 'The Bible [is] the Religion of the Protestants'.<sup>5</sup> The words of the Book are claimed as the final authority in matters of the Protestant Church and embody the divine purpose and revelation. The faith and actions of Christians are often the result of what they read into or out of the Bible, some even make a sacred object of the Bible. The Reformation claims of Luther that heralded Protestantism in the 16<sup>th</sup> century were drawn from a reinterpretation of the written Scripture. The missionary movements, particularly those spearheaded by Carey in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, were born and inspired from the reading of the Gospel and aimed to spread this Gospel beyond the shores of Christian Europe.<sup>6</sup>

Carey believed that the text in New Testament, 'go and preach, teach and make disciples of all nations' in Matthew 28:19 (also Mark 16: 15, Luke 24: 47-49) was a command to Christians of his generation as much as it was to the apostles. It was Carey's pamphlet he wrote in 1792 entitled, *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, which was instrumental in the establishing of the Baptist Missionary Society.<sup>7</sup> For the Baptist mission in India, the Bible, its translation and placing it in people's hand, became its essential task and pre-occupation. The 'use of means for conversion' was a significant phrase and for him it essentially turned out to be Christian communication through the printed word and in the mother-tongue. This actually meant Bible translation into many languages, learning the dialects, transposing them from oral to written forms, mass printing and vigorous distribution.<sup>8</sup> The emphasis placed on the written Word, the print and its significance in mission communication could be gauged from the event of Carey's completion of the first translation of the Bengali New Testament, and its printing of 2000 copies. William Ward commented at this publication, "We

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<sup>5</sup> Chapter 8, pp. 115-128. Also see J M Neale's lecture delivered in 1852 on Protestantism and entitled, *The Bible and the Bible Only the Religion of Protestants*. Second Edition. London: Joseph Masters, Aldergate Street, 1952.

<sup>6</sup> Dillenberger, John and Welch, Claude. *Protestant Christianity Interpreted Through its Development*. New York: Charles Scribner's Son's, 1954, p. 166.

<sup>7</sup> Carey, William. *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. New facsimile edition with an introduction by Ernest A. Payne. London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1961.

<sup>8</sup> In the words of BMS historian Brian Stanley, William Carey was "a man who was primarily responsible for the translation of the entire Bible into six languages and of parts of it into a further twenty-nine." The Serampore Mission translated and printed the Bible or portions of it into a total of about forty oriental languages. Carey was appointed a professor of Bengali at Fort William College and pioneered a newspaper in India. See Stanley, Brian, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society 1792-1992*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992, p. 38. The Serampore Press had printed a total of 212, 000 volumes in different languages between 1801-32, a record number for its time.

shall be joined by two thousand missionaries of whose success I dare not indulge the least doubt." For its dedication service on the 7<sup>th</sup> February 1801, Joshua Marshman wrote a poem whose opening words read,

Hail, precious book divine! Illumined by thy rays,  
We rise from death and sin, And tune a Saviour's praise.  
The shades of error, dark as night, Vanish before thy radiant light.<sup>9</sup>

And Carey preached from Colossians 3: 16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly".<sup>10</sup> Marshman's acclaim of the power and divine status of the book, Ward's personification of the Book *as a missionary itself*, and Carey's emphasis on appropriating the Word epitomised the central and unique place of the written Scripture in the heart of the Serampore Mission.<sup>11</sup> The Serampore missionaries set the trend for subsequent missionaries, to Orissa and elsewhere, in communication through the written word. The pioneers of Orissa mission were guided and encouraged by Carey himself and the Kondh hills missionaries also worked closely with the Orissa mission.<sup>12</sup> The Orissa Mission Press established not long after the opening of the mission in Cuttack created its own parallel story to the Serampore Press of Carey and his colleagues.

## 2. In Orissa and Kondh Hills Baptist Mission

Mission was strongly influenced by the print culture of Serampore Mission. The first Orissa missionaries, the Peggs and Bampton families, collected large numbers of books and tracts from Serampore and Calcutta on their way to Cuttack. In John Clifford's words they carried an "Oriya Christian Library" consisting of books, pamphlets, gospel tracts, including the Oriya Bible which Carey had already translated. These books included:<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Underhill, Edward Bean, "Bible Translation" in Myers, John Brown (Ed.). *The Centenary Volume of the Baptist Missionary Society 1792-1892*. London: The Baptist Missionary Society, 1893, p. 277. This is the first verse out of four in the original.

<sup>10</sup> Myers J B (Ed.). *The Centenary Volume*...pp. 277-278.

<sup>11</sup> For a fuller account of the Serampore mission work, see Marshman, John Clark. *The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward: Embracing the History of the Serampore Mission*. (Vols. I & II). London: Longman, Brown and Green, 1859.

<sup>12</sup> The first Baptist missionaries of Orissa from GBMS had arrived in Serampore to receive Carey's advice on a prospective mission field. They continued to receive literature and printing help from Serampore until the Orissa Mission Press was established in Cuttack. Serampore missionaries like Oliver Millman came to develop education among the Kui and Walter Winfield from the Kondh mission went to serve in Serampore College. Such exchanges continued as necessary.

<sup>13</sup> Clifford, John. "The Orissa Mission" in Myres, John Brown (Ed). *The Centenary Volume of the Baptist Missionary Society (1792-1892)*. London: Baptist Missionary Society, 1892, p. 244.

1. *The Oriya Bible* in five volumes translated by William Carey assisted by his Oriya pundit Mrutyunjay Vidyalkar.
2. *A Vocabulary, Ooriya and English, for the use of Students* compiled by Mohan Prasad Thakur.
3. *The Immortal History of Christ*, "a poem composed by a Bengali Christian, and set out in a verse that would win its way to the ear and fancy of the Oriyas."
4. *Stopping of the Car of Jagannath* A tract by William Ward
5. *Folly of Worshipping Jagannath*
6. A leaflet containing an extract from the Scriptures.

In terms of sheer quantity, they collected and brought "one thousand Gospel and Epistles in Oriya and five hundred tracts" from Serampore and from the Calcutta Auxiliary Bible Society a "generous donations of scriptures and tracts in various languages."<sup>14</sup> Peggs commented, "We go forth bearing precious seed."<sup>15</sup> His words best summarise the Baptist Mission's emphasis on the written word. The 'seed' and its 'sowing' are the often repeated metaphors in the Baptist missionary writings used for the 'Word of God' and its 'preaching and evangelism' respectively which they carried out relentlessly.

The Orissa Mission was established in Cuttack in 1838. The role of the Mission Press became central to the goal of the Mission in Orissa and the amount of printing and distribution of literature was remarkable for its time. Within a year of establishing the press, a total of 429, 500 tracts and books had been circulated.<sup>16</sup> By 1858 the press was employing 18 persons and had printed,

a total of 952,700 tracts of between twelve and thirty-six pages, 77,000 Gospels, 31,050 miscellaneous portions of Scripture, 25,575 'bona fide religious volumes' and 34,750 volumes or parts of educational series. These figures do not include the editions of the Old and New Testaments and Sutton's dictionary and do not take into account the relatively small amount of work done in English and the considerable amount in Oriya undertaken for the government.<sup>17</sup>

The 1901 report of R J Grundy, the press manager, mentioned that the book *The Life of Christ and the Way of Salvation* 'continues to be popular and selling well' and the total number published by then (consisting 280 pages) had reached ninety eight

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<sup>14</sup> Shaw, Graham W. "The Cuttack Mission Press and Early Oriya Printing" in *The British Library Journal*, vol. 3 (1977), pp. 29-43.

<sup>15</sup> Myres, John Brown. *The Centenary Volume...*, p. 243.

<sup>16</sup> Shaw, Graham W. "The Cuttack Mission Press..." p. 37.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 41.

thousand.<sup>18</sup> The print list with volumes printed that year look quite impressive for its time.<sup>19</sup>

| <u>BOOKS</u>                        | <u>COPIES</u> |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| New Testament (II Cor to Rev)       | 3000          |
| James and John                      | 3000          |
| Children's Hymns                    | 1000          |
| Jagannath Tested                    | 10,000        |
| Ten Commandments                    | 5000          |
| What is Christianity                | 5000          |
| Baptismal Covenant                  | 500           |
| Pilgrims Progress, Part I           | 1500          |
| Phulmoni and Karuna                 | 1000          |
| Pilgrim's Progress, Part II         | 1500          |
| Gospel of John (Sanskrit)           | 1000          |
| Just Balance                        | 2000          |
| Church Hymns                        | 4000          |
| Sermon on the Mount                 | 5000          |
| Objections Refuted                  | 3000          |
| Won by Kindness                     | 3000          |
| Story of Jesus                      | 2000          |
| Children of the Bible               | 1500          |
| The Atonement                       | 500           |
| Adeney's Teaching of St Paul        | 500           |
| Line Upon Line, Part II             | 1000          |
| Christian Endeavour Hymns           | 3000          |
| Selection of Tracts                 | 2000          |
| Lutheran Catechism                  | 5000          |
| Morning Star (Monthly)              | 5100          |
| Sunday School Leaflet               | 1320          |
| Children's Leaflet                  | 69,750        |
| Fables, Part I & II                 | 2000          |
| Oriya English Dictionary            | 1000          |
| Psalms in Verse                     | 3000          |
| Gospel by Luke (large type)         | 2000          |
| Life of Christ and Way of Salvation | 20,000        |

In addition to these other books in English, Kui and other tribal languages, including books and documents for the government were printed.

The Press brought out modern, secular and scientific publications and also attacked the apparent “superstition and idolatry” of Hinduism. The Christian press helped in the emergence of a new discourse on Hindu society, tradition and values.

<sup>18</sup> Grundy, R. J. "Orissa Mission Press, Report of 1901" in *Indian Report of the Orissa Baptist Mission for 1901*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1901, pp. 11-12.

<sup>19</sup> Grundy, R. J. "Orissa Mission Press Report..., Report, pp. 11-12.

Historian Dhall remarked that it helped to kindle and foster a spirit of inquiry and initiated a new era of Oriya and Christian writers.

In real terms the establishment of the press in 1838 encouraged some kind of literary activity in Orissa. Before...literary development in Orissa existed in the form of medieval poetry. The missionaries encouraged literary works through their printing and publications. The development of Christian literature in Oriya language definitely influenced Oriya literature."<sup>20</sup>

Insistence on literacy was linked to the emphasis on the written word as sacred text. In the missionary view, moreover, literacy aided a rational mind which was the way to understanding the rational and written Christian Scripture and the Gospel.<sup>21</sup> Baptist argument and rationale saw literacy as "that instrument to which the nations of Europe are so greatly indebted for whatever superiority they enjoy over the ancient world."<sup>22</sup> It was perceived as an important key to civilization as well as Christianisation.

The introduction and development of writing in many tribal languages of Orissa including the Kui language was a missionary initiative. As Dhall says, "missionaries were the first to give recognition to these tribal languages by printing tracts in their spoken language."<sup>23</sup> Books in these tribal languages, mainly in Kui, Santal, Soura and Munda languages, were printed in the Orissa Mission Press.

Among the Kui people writing was first introduced by the British EIC officer Captain J P Frye, with the same intention as missionaries later, that formal education would complete the social 'reform' which they had initiated. Frye wrote some Kui primers using the Oriya script containing Christian texts. He and other officers established some schools. Writing as a medium largely remained an administrative instrument used in offices, courts, police stations and in trading. The language used was Oriya, rarely English; Telugu was briefly tried but *not* Kui.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Dhall, M. *The British Rule: Missionaries Activities in Orissa*. New Delhi: Har-Anand, 1997, p. 211.

<sup>21</sup> Hefner's theory of conversion stressed on the rationality of Christianity. See Hefner, R W (Ed). *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation*. California: University of California Press, 1993.

<sup>22</sup> Declared the *Baptist Missionary Magazine* (September 1846, p. 290). See Sharma, J. "Missionaries and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Assam: The *Orunodoi* Periodical of the American Baptist Mission" in Frykenberg, R E (Ed). *Christians and Missionaries in India*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, p. 260.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>24</sup> Telugu was briefly experimented with for education, as Kui was considered to be more akin to the Dravidian language than to Oriya which is of Sanskritic origin. But the experiment was a failure.



From the beginning missionaries used the written medium for gospel communication. Pioneer missionary Wilkinson learned the language soon and within two years of his arrival in 1891 he had translated and produced the Gospel of Mark in Kui. Missionary emphasis from the beginning was on Kui rather than Oriya for communication, and they learned the language to establish relationship with people. They endeavoured to produce the grammar, vocabulary and wrote school primers and they started Kui medium schools. They translated the Bible, produced Christian books for evangelism and books for use in worship and liturgy. All the support which the Kui language received was from the missionaries. Oriya, though, was used in a limited way for practical reasons, being the language of the state, of higher education, and also due to relationship of the Kui church with the church in Orissa.<sup>25</sup>

## B. Tracing Kui Literature: Gospel to the Kui in the Written Word

Unlike the Roman Catholic mission, which preferred the Oriya Bible, the Baptist missionaries mainly saw the importance and need of the Kui language for Kui education and for Christian communication. Apart from better communication of the gospel, missionary attention to the language enhanced pride in and sentiment towards the language, otherwise regarded inferior by Oriya speakers.

The written word's significance for gospel communication in Kui was due to the fact that the substantial book to be produced in Kui was the Bible, the New Testament (*Puni Saja*) in particular. A hymn book (*Penu Gadi*) and a Pastor's manual were produced next. Other books were smaller and Oriya books were supplemented at a later stage as Oriya was increasingly replacing Kui in formal communication. But in the initial years of the mission Kui was essential and books or writing in Kui were its medium of communication.

### 1. Captain J P Frye's Vital Initial Initiatives

The translation of Psalm 67 into Kui using the Oriya script in 1851 by Captain J P Frye, the linguistically-gifted British EIC officer, was the first piece of Kui written text. He printed the material in his own lithographic press brought from

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<sup>25</sup> Some missionaries learned both Oriya and Kui. With the spread of education and communication Oriya was increasingly used in the hills. Some Pan villages in the south of Kondhmal district are Oriya-speaking. The Pans in the Udaygiri area speak Kui and many can speak and understand Oriya as well. A growing number of Kondhs today, most Kondh males, Kondhs living closer to the main communication routes and those who are school educated can speak Oriya. All Kondhs and most Pans speak Kui at home. The government had no policy to develop Kui language, Oriya having been imposed on the Kui from the beginning.

England. Frye was a linguist, an administrator by profession but a missionary at heart. He wrote a number of school primers including a grammar book for the schools which he and his colleagues were beginning to establish.<sup>26</sup> The Orissa Mission Press in Cuttack was involved from the beginning in printing these books. This was part of the 'civilizing' mission to provide the 'noble savages' with 'useful knowledge' to promote 'godly society'. Frye was a keen Christian and his initial vital initiative had his Christian imprint on what he produced. The following are the main books which Frye wrote:<sup>27</sup>

1. *An Introduction to the Kondh grammar*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1853.
2. *The History of Joseph in Kui or Kondh Language, Cuttack*: Orissa Mission Press, 1851
3. *A Grammar and Progressive Reading Lessons in the Kondh Language, with an English Translation*, Cuttack: OMP, 1851.
4. *Dialogue and Sentences in the Kondh Language with an English Translation*, Cuttack: OMP, 1851.
5. *Fables in the Kondh Language with an Oriya Translation*, Cuttack: OMP, 1851.
6. *Fables in the Kondh Language with an English Translation*, Cuttack: OMP, 1851
7. *Primer and Progressive Reading Lessons in the Kondh Language*, Cuttack: OMP, 1851.

Frye gave the Kui their first written literature and their first Christian text. A few other British officers and one Indian colleague also seem to have tried their hand at producing grammar books or Kui Language Handbooks. Letchmajee was the deputy translator of the Ganjam Agent's Office who wrote a grammar book at the same time as Frye. The works of some others were attempts to improve upon the previous ones. These books included:

1. Letchmajee, Lingum. *An Introduction to the Grammar of the Kui or Kandh Language*. Calcutta: Calcutta Christian Observer, 1853.
2. Caldwell, Robert. *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages*, London: Trubner, 1875. Also deals with the Kui language
3. Smith, Major J MacDonald. *A Practical Handbook of the Khond Language*, Cuttack: Orissa Mission Press, 1876.
4. Friend-Pereira, J E. *A Grammar of the Kui Language*. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book depot, 1909.
5. Driver, L. *Language Hand-book. Kui* (for private circulation) Calcutta: Tea District Labour Association, 1926.

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<sup>26</sup> Frye, J P. *Primer and Progressive Reading Lessons in the Khond Language*. Cuttack: Orissa Mission Press, 1851.

<sup>27</sup> Winfield, W W. *A Grammar of the Kui Language*. (*Bibliotheca Indica: A Collection of Oriental Works*). Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1928, p. 235.

After Frye there seems to have been no earnest effort to continue the beginning he had made until the arrival of missionaries nearly half a century later in 1891. The missionaries' initial years were focused on Bible translation and from 1909 mission schools were begun to be set up.

## 2. Early Missionary Initiatives

The *Gospel of Mark* was the first gospel book to be translated; Abiathar Wilkinson completed it in 1893. It was published as *Marka Inji Suvarta Pothanta* (*The Gospel of Mark in Kui or Khond*) by the Madras Auxiliary of the Bible Society (MABS), and printed at the Orissa Mission Press, Cuttack. A second edition was printed in 1900. Wilkinson also revised Frye's *The History of Joseph* and published as *The History of Joseph in Kui or Kondh Language from Genesis 37 & 39-50* (*Josepani Kau*) by MABS in 1895. His colleague Arthur Long edited it again in 1909 and added to it *Exodus* Chapters 1-20. Arthur Long also translated and published the *Life of Christ in Kui* as *Negi Katha* or *The Good Story* in 1907. This book was originally written by P E Heberlet of the Berhampore Mission as *The Way of Salvation*. This was one of the best selling books of the Orissa Mission Press at that time. These early Kui books contained many Oriya words and were continuously in need of revision.

Oliver Millman, the architect of school education, came from Serampore College. He was sent to the Kondh hills to set up schools, which he began from 1909. His attempt at Kui medium schools was path breaking and his schools received full strength students from the Kui community, including some girls. However, his other new attempt to introduce Roman script in Kui writing was not successful and ultimately gave way to pressure from Oriya. His educational work is discussed in detail in chapter five. Millman wrote school textbooks using the Roman alphabet, omitting 'c, q and y' which he thought redundant to Kui. He began to revise some earlier books and the *Gospel of Mark* written in Oriya script. He newly translated the *Gospels of Luke, John* and *Acts*. He attempted the translation of the complete New Testament and in the Roman alphabet, but could not finish as he had to leave before its completion. The choice of the Roman alphabet was not followed by successive missionaries and Oriya alphabet was re-introduced in writing. The early books of Captain Frye and the school books produced by missionary Millman contained passages from the Bible, for reading, writing and for exercises. Gospel books were also used in schools as reader. Some of Millman's translations and books were:

1. *The History of Joseph in Egypt and the Wandering of the Children of Israel, Exodus 1-20. (Jusepo-tiri Katta enga Israelo lokuri Jriti Katta)*, (Prepared from the 1909 edition) Cuttack: OMP, 1912 (65 pages).
2. *Kui Primer for Infant Classes*. Cuttack: OMP, 1913.
3. *The Gospel of Mark in Kond or Kui. (Jisitiri Negi Soddi)*. Cuttack: OMP, 1915 (76 pages). He revised.
4. *Model Kui Reader of Infant Class*. Cuttack: OMP, 1915.
5. *The Gospel of John in Kond or Kui. (Jisitiri Negi Soddi Johono Vrisa Mani Aka)*. Cuttack: OMP, 1916 (90 pages). Translated by him.
6. *Model Kui Reader for Standard I*. Cuttack: OMP, 1917.
7. *The Acts of the Apostles in Kond or Kui. (Panda Masari Gitari)*. Cuttack: OMP, 1918 (116 pages). Translated by him.
8. *Model Kui Reader for Standard II*. Cuttack: OMP, 1919.

Some of Millman's students including Kogera Pradhan helped him in the translation work. During this period Kogera also independently wrote down the spoken words of the Kondh sacrificial rituals using the Roman script. These spoken words of invocations and priestly words which were kept in memory, used and handed down to successive generations orally were written down by him for the first time. A short Hymn Book and Catechisms were also brought out during Millman's time. But Millman had to leave due to the death of his infant daughter and the failing health of his wife. The progress of the translation of the complete New Testament was thus hindered. The momentum in extending school education also suffered after his departure. The pattern of using individual Gospel books continued and the translation of the complete Testament was to be taken up later. The following editions were also printed before the New Testament was completed; while all these and above mentioned books are out of print today, some are in the Baptist Mission archives.

1. *The Gospel of Matthew. (Mathew Bistra Mani Aku)*. Cuttack: OMP, 1930
2. *The Gospel of Luke in Kui. (Luka Bistra Mani Aku)*. Cuttack: OMP, 1930
3. *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans. (Romitakari Bahtangi Paulo Vrisa Manni Aku)*. Calcutta: British & Foreign Bible Society, 1935
4. *The Epistle to the Corinthians. (Korintotakari Bahtangi Paulo Vrisa Manni Aku)*. Cuttack: OMP, 1938

### 3. Missionary and the Kui Written word

From the beginning, missionaries had used books and printed literature as a means of evangelism. Goadby, who made the very first evangelistic tours of the hills

in 1862, read to his listeners from a Kui translation of *Peep of Day*.<sup>28</sup> After Goadby and before any regular mission started the Bible Society from Berhampore Mission sent evangelists to the hills to distribute books in the weekly market places. Arthur Long mentioned carrying "gospels (5,000) and other books" to the hills in one of his visits from his base in Russelkonda in 1902.<sup>29</sup> Presumably books were bought by the few literates who read to others also. Missionaries translated select books or portions from the Bible which they considered suitable for evangelistic purposes. The usual order of translation seems the Gospels, the Psalms, parts of the Old Testament, then the Epistles.

The complete Kui New Testament, *PUNI SAJA: Kui Kata Dai Brisa Manari* was finally published in May 1954. This version also contained some Kui Christian hymns at the end. Millman and Mrs Helen Evans had worked on the complete New Testament and after Millman left, Helen Evans completed the translation, helped by Kui Christians. By 1968 the New Testament was revised again—all copies of the previous translation had been sold out a few years earlier. In 2001, during my visit and field study, the translation of the Old Testament was ready to go to press.

The Kui Hymn Book, *Penu Gadi* which contained 111 hymns, was compiled by Mrs Helen Evans and published as early as 1925. The hymns were composed by Kui Christians and missionaries and some were translations from the English. A Pastor's Manual, *Penu Kabadi Gatanike Adinary* (Companion for God's Workers) was prepared by Rev Sunam Patro Naik, a senior cleric, and Rev Bruce Henry, the missionary.

Among other major books, missionary Walter Winfield produced a thorough Kui grammar, *A Grammar in the Kui Language*, in 1928, published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal (248 pages). He also wrote and published the following year *A Vocabulary of the Kui Language (Kui-English)*. Other booklets in circulation included religious pamphlets as well as pamphlets on literacy, health, hygiene and others subjects. Some were printed and others were typed and cyclostyled. They include.

1. *Jisutari Kerondi* (The Story of Jesus)
2. *Penui Dohnari* (A Selection of The Psalms)

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<sup>28</sup> Carey Pearce. *Dawn on the Kond Hills*, p. 37. *Peep of Day: A Series of the Earliest Religious Instructions the Infant Mind is Capable of Receiving* was originally written by Mrs Favell Lee Bevan-Mortimer some times in the 1840s, was translated into other languages and popular with early missionaries. It was produced in Oriya and Kui by the Orissa Mission Press as *Arunodaya*.

<sup>29</sup> Carey, Pearce. pp. 37, 42 and 55.



3. *Jisu Kata* (The Story of Jesus)
4. *Nai Todenja* (My Companion)
5. *Biludi Janari* (Evening Prayers)
6. *Penu Bahta Janari* (A Call to Prayer)
7. *Reha Gadi* (Happy Songs)
8. *Podi Apakasu* (Let Us Read)
9. *Mai Idu* (My House) An illustrated booklet for Adult Education<sup>30</sup>

Kui literature and writing was solely a missionary endeavour with contribution from local Kui. The mission schools and a vigorous Adult Education programme attracted many from their community to come forward to learn to read and write. The use of Kui written literature was mainly confined to the church and the mission, being used in evangelism, church worship and in the mission work of literacy, health and community works. In some semi-rural or Oriya-knowing churches the Oriya Bible was read in Sunday services, however the rest of the service including the sermons were in Kui in all churches.

Christian books were sold and distributed regularly and were bought by people. Although the low literacy rate limited the reach of the written medium and the community was not yet familiar with a book culture, nevertheless the medium was useful and did play a role in communication to a certain extent. Under British administration and through school education, the place, usefulness and legitimacy of the written word was gradually becoming familiar to people exposed to or using the written texts or documents. The new medium and the new cultural addition was not merely a novelty but a desirable elite commodity, and one which carried ideas, information and messages, reaching people directly through the reader or through the reader to the listener. In this context the Kui New Testament and other books of the Christian mission were significant for communication and impact of their message on people.

## C. The Kui Bible: Its Role and Impact for Conversion

### 1. Emphasis of the Mission

The BMS mission's preference for and emphasis on the written word of God and literacy development to enable reading engaged them in translation and printing of Bible and Christian books so it reached into people's hands and to wider areas. Even though literacy was very low and in fact few could read in those early days, the

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<sup>30</sup> Personal file of missionary Rev Bruce Henry and Joyce Henry.

Mission believed literacy development should be taken up from the beginning and so started schools and adult literacy classes. Time, efforts, and money were put into the production of written/printed materials, making it a major communication channel. As commented by a BMS missionary, the primary importance and attention given to this medium is clear,

Bible translation in the exactness and fullness, and the distribution of the Word of God to the widest possible extent, is the historic achievement and present purpose of the Baptist Missionary Society. From the earliest days of the Serampore press, BMS missionaries have been foremost as Oriental Linguists in retelling in Asiatic speech the inspired message of God's redeeming love to mankind...we have won a position of recognised leadership among the missionary societies of this country and America in respect to the matter of Bible translation and Christian literature on the mission field.<sup>31</sup>

The Serampore Mission set the example and the Cuttack and Kondh hills Baptist Mission similarly undertook translation, print and literature distribution on a scale disproportionate to the rate of actual literacy. Bible translation was going on almost continuously as revisions and re-translations were taken up by successive missionaries. Rev Bruce Henry who headed one translation committee admitted that Bible translation absorbed a major portion of their resources:

The Bible Society has guided ...and covered its running expenses; but the BMS and the local Church Union have also borne a large share of responsibility through the contribution of their personnel. The new translation admittedly absorbs a great deal of time, not to mention expenses. But...if it proves an essential feature in the growth of Christ's Church among primitive people, then we can not begrudge the effort entailed.<sup>32</sup>

The Bible and associated literature, without regard to the actual or functional readership of people, was used as a major and important Christian communication tool. It was assumed that the written Bible would speak for itself, convince people of sin and persuade them to seek personal salvation. Whether this intended message was the same as that understood by the reader/listener is another matter; in most cases it was not, doctrine being of little interest as we shall see below. However, the mere availability of the Bible, its Scriptural status, the culture of group reading (one reads so many others can hear) and also the permanence of the written word, which people could return to again and again as needed, all helped to communicate.

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<sup>31</sup> Wilson, Rev C.E. "The BMS and the Bible" in *The Missionary Herald*, May 1921, p. 134.

<sup>32</sup> Henry, Rev Bruce. "The Word for the People in Kui" in *Missionary Herald*, Feb 1968, pp. 22-23.

From an emphasis on the priority and pre-eminence of the written word the Bible and books were produced in quantities for mass distribution involving heavy investment, and the impact of the force of its presence in wider areas made its message familiar. Distribution, re-distribution and circulation were the strengths of the printed words and useful in evangelisation.

## 2. Books and Bible as Desirable Objects

The Mission schools popularised education among the Kui and a literate class was emerging among them who were familiar with books and could access its contents. The books were also regarded as an elite commodity. Whether one could read or not, books of story, song or a New Testament were desirable and decorative possessions, and could also be read with the help of others. Possession of books was an assertion of equality with outsiders and even of elite status. The gospels were the first books to become available for reading in the language and so it was the Christian Scripture which was available as the first reading material for the newly literate. Christian books were subsidised and many distributed free, finding easy access to homes and the hands of people. In the Mission hostels, Bible reading was ritually and regularly done. Christian households were encouraged to buy, read and to have personal copies of the Bible or New Testament. The whole New Testament rather than individual Gospel books sold well, says Boal, and the Bible is the first book a Kui Christian or prospective convert bought.

A campaign to stimulate interest has resulted in a startling increase in book sales in recent years...A Bible or New Testament is the first thing a literate convert buys. Many others, even if illiterate, buy it for someone else to read to them. Single Gospels, though much cheaper, do not sell. It would seem that some at least of the new converts feel the need of the Bible as a tangible emblem in place of the household "gods" they have turned out.<sup>33</sup>

She also observed that book sales in a five year period between 1956-60 had increased substantially:<sup>34</sup>

|      |             |      |             |
|------|-------------|------|-------------|
| 1956 | Rs. 320.00  | 1959 | Rs. 1758.17 |
| 1957 | Rs. 977.94  | 1960 | Rs. 2300.00 |
| 1958 | Rs. 1562.12 |      |             |

<sup>33</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Church in the Kond Hills: An Encounter with Animism*. Nagpur: The National Christian Council of India, 1963, p. 93.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. pp. 93-94.

She comments that in the Pokari area of villages, while the Demovadi village had only 6 literate persons, 8 persons each possessed a Bible. Similarly in Gluda village only one person could read but 3 persons possessed a Bible and the Gonjuguda village, similarly, had only one literate person whereas 5 were in possession of a Bible.<sup>35</sup> The reason is not difficult to understand, because books could be read with the help of others who could read and not necessarily by the buyer. A Bible could be proudly shown to Christian relatives, friends or pastor visiting the family for prayer/fellowship. In such occasions, normally a verse or passage is read by a literate and prayer for the family is offered by the visiting pastor or Christian friends who has arrived for fellowship. The possession of a Bible is an unstated need for those times of Christian togetherness or fellowship. Moreover, the Bible was a symbol of their Christian identity for the new converts and also symbolic of their new and prestige status acquired through conversion.

### 3. The Bible in Kui: A New Kui Identity

The Kui Bible gave a new identity to the language and the people; the language was now seen as comparable with other written languages. The written Bible was a cultural object of pride—the Kui too were now a people with their own book. Now they had their own sacred book just as their Hindu neighbours. The Bible replaced the less powerful spirit-objects of the local religion, and was considered as a more powerful object. Moreover transposing of oral Kui into the written text like any others was a cultural evolution, indeed in the eyes of the upwardly mobile and school educated Kui it was cultural elevation. The Book was used for its symbolic value as a central Christian symbol and as the new Christian identity. To be part of the new community of Christians it was necessary to have the central identity object of that community. The possession of the Book was an assertion of the new identity and membership of the new Christian community.

### 4. Written Books and the Bible as Christian Symbol

In the Baptist Church in the hills, the Bible has become the central Christian symbol only next to the church building. In the home as well as in the church the Bible is the main symbolic object of Christianity. It may not be common to have a

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<sup>35</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Church in the Kond Hills*, p. 94.

prominent cross in every church or family in the hills but it is normal that the Bible and hymn book are in the hands of church-goers, in the church, with Sunday School children and in homes of Christians. According to the missionaries, the Bible constituted the message and rituals of Christianity and contained the fundamentals of the Baptist faith, doctrine and practices. The missionaries meant the words of the Bible to be read, understood and obeyed. However, to the Kui, even those who were literate, the Bible was neither an easy book to understand nor did it contain systematic accounts of faith and practices. Rather because of the heavy emphasis on the Bible as doctrine, conveyed by the Mission, the people treated the Bible as an iconic object. In practical use by the people, it remained more iconic and symbolic of Christian identity, despite the Baptist opposition to icons of faith.

## 5. An Object of Power and Replacement for Spirit-objects

The use of the Bible as an object of power is nothing new among Christians. Many Christians in the Indian religious context believe in the intrinsic power of the Book. In the Kui situation, it was both by choice and necessity that the Bible has been used as an object of power and a weapon against the dangers facing the people. In the conversion movement, the spirit-objects kept in each house were disposed of or were required to be disposed of as a first step towards conversion. These objects were the focus and centre of their former belief and their loss created a vacuum. Sometimes the visit of a pastor and his prayer and counselling or teaching came later. Even baptisms were only after a period of testing and were conditional on passing an examination. So in such circumstances the Book of the Bible was widely used, being put to good use as a powerful object, a god-object, handy for filling in the vacuum. During the period of rapid conversions the book of the Bible was an immediate replacement for the spirit-objects which were being disposed of. The Bible continued to be used, sometimes explicitly and sometimes discreetly and in a subtle and subconscious way, as a powerful object to counteract any possible backlash from the spirits that are no longer revered by the converts. For many the Bible was the visible presence of the power of the Christian god.

In 1955 a man called Kuti, met on the road, begged for a Bible. He was not a Christian. The last Bible had been sold on that camp...In March 1956 he walked in many miles and claimed his Bible. No one knew then that he could not read. He took the Bible home and threw out his gods...He said, 'I cannot read this book but it



contains the words of the one true God...this Bible is to show that He is in my house.<sup>36</sup>

The pastors or evangelists used the Bible (or were asked by the would-be converts) to dispose of the spirit-objects which they sometimes did with prayer and reading of the Bible. Similarly, reading of the Bible and prayer was also done for healing of sicknesses by claiming the power from the Bible. Using the Bible for healing, either by a physical touch of it or by reading and invoking its power in prayer or by believing its promises of healing was also known to be practiced. "One convert who fell seriously ill with fever, for instance, placed the Bible on his chest, and found through the feel of it a peace of mind" or "the Bible as a tangible emblem in place of the house-hold 'gods' was another example."<sup>37</sup> Boal explains,

... it is an understandable action by someone from that particular background who has newly come into an extremely simple, though strong, faith in Christ. It certainly does not appear from this and similar occurrences that there is a danger of the Bible's being actually worshipped, for no idol would be freely handled as the Bible is by all believers.<sup>38</sup>

The new Christian faith of the Kui was not necessarily "extremely simple" and the actions in conversion were rather characteristic of Kui pragmatism which Boal herself attests in other instances of Kui practices. The converts might not talk about actually worshipping the Bible, nor we might suggest did they worship in the old ways of keeping faith. No one I interviewed did mention such a use of the Bible to me. When the new converts and 'seekers' frequently asked for and bought a Bible, it was not necessarily for reading alone but for its symbolic and status value, as well as for a belief in its perceived potency and power. The Bible thus met an old need in a new way, though subconsciously rather than deliberately. This was the innovative and pragmatic use made by the converts independent of and outside the missionary teaching.

In my interview, senior Kui church leader, Rev Sunam Patro Naik, claimed that it was faith in the power of the Bible, often literally in the Book, that helped people to convert. He was a frontline Christian worker and led teams of evangelists during the conversion movement, preaching and conducting baptisms. He was candid about the Kondh use of the Bible as an object of power. He recounted what he has

<sup>36</sup> Staples, S M. "Witch-Doctor Won for Christ" in *The Baptist Missionary Herald*, Jan (1959), p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Boal, Barbara. p. 93.

<sup>38</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Church in the Kond Hills*, p. 93.

witnessed in the remote villages, how people conveniently and rather practically used the Bible to become Christian. According to him from his experience of ministry, the Bible indeed was a useful object in conversion and was firmly believed to have the power over and to replace the spirit-objects, to protect, to heal and to free them from the obligations of sacrifices. The possession of a Bible emboldened them to defy the costly obligations of sacrifices and to use it against the dangers from hostile spirits apprehended previously. Some old ways were discreetly continued behind the back of senior Christians or missionaries. It was neither practical nor possible to sever all roots of the old ways and to take a complete plunge into Christianity, as the missionaries would have much desired of them.

Change came to the Kui people gradually and slowly, and the new ways were put to test and time was taken to appropriate the new. Parents continued to have amulets on infants, believed to be particularly vulnerable and prone to dangers from evil eyes or concerned spirits. Similarly, in events of death contact with the deceased was to be ensured. Ancestors' presence in the community is a reality though unseen and it was generally believed that the spirit of the dead normally entered into a spider immediately after the death. Therefore the spider was hunted and brought home and fed. The missionary anxiety was quite evident about such practices by some new Christians,

What should the Kui Christians do about this (spider hunts) custom?...What should the Church do about charms for babies? That question is *settled*. The Church in the Kond Hills says a *down-right "No"*. Charms are banned for Christians.<sup>39</sup>

These actions of the converts were part of a clever and critical negotiation with the new faith. Before the claims of the new faith could be fully comprehended and assimilated it was not possible to let go all the old rituals of parents and the beliefs inherited from ancestors. Though the old custom was now increasingly doubted and seemed ineffective, the new faith was yet to be fully tested, tried and the Christian message fully internalised. While the Mission and the Church wanted the abstract concepts and teachings from the Bible to be read, memorised and reproduced in the exams to qualify for baptism and be declared Christian, the Kui wanted a living presence of the new God in the Bible. The Bible in the mission was claimed to embody the word of God for salvation but the message the Kui interpreted and accepted was a new god-object, one powerful enough to protect them.

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<sup>39</sup> "Spider Hunts Raise Problems for Growing Church" in *The Missionary Herald*, June 1959, p. 22.

Thus in writing/print, the books and the Bible, the Kui perceived the cultural pride, status symbol, god-object and power to secure a better life. The Bible was put to the test and was accepted seriously for its power. It was effective during the critical transition from the old faith to the new Christian faith and impacted in the above ways: exactly how it was seen was up to the converts. They picked and chose from what Christianity or its protagonists offered and promised.

#### D. The Impact of the Written Word: The Converts' Response

Christopher Bayly observed that colonial rule brought a new 'information movement' through the dissemination of printed knowledge unprecedented in India.<sup>40</sup> He pointed out that this was largely limited to the educated upper caste in India and, moreover, developed against an already existing written tradition serving the interests of those literate classes.

However, this was not the case among the tribals like the Kondhs. For them writing meant a transition from the spoken to the written and the literacy, which achieved this transition, and was mediated by the missionaries. Writing itself, putting Kui into the written form, was developed by the missionaries and also a reading-writing movement was exclusively based on Christian information and content. Books brought new ideas, knowledge and information from outside, new religious ideas and also facts of science, about the human body and the natural world. School books taught and emphasised facts and science, for example astronomy and geography being some of the subjects, which was in contrast to the traditional view of the natural world and the cosmos. These were windows to new worlds and worldviews, and bound to have their effect on the Kui's apparently closed world.

The books and the written word previously associated with the dominant community and seen as the possessions of the learned class and literary profession, and therefore irrelevant to the Kui, entered into the Kui world through British administration and school education. Schools and literature produced a new literate class and books began to be desired by the educated and socially upwardly mobile, and also by those who could afford or have access to it.<sup>41</sup> With increasing exposure and cultural influence from outside they began to demand books and desired to learn

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<sup>40</sup> Bayly, C. A. *Empire and Information: Intelligence gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870*. Cambridge: CUP, 1996, p. 215.

<sup>41</sup> In pre-19<sup>th</sup> century India writing was confined to classical languages only, such as Sanskrit and Persian, and missionaries broke this monopoly and wrote in local languages and brought books to the common people. See Nehru, Jawaharlal. *Discovery of India*, London: Meridan Books, 1960.

to read. It is significant that the first and early Christian converts among the Kui were literate and were reading the Gospels and Christian books before their conversion. Long before conversions began in the hills the four Gospel book, The Book of Acts, the Psalms, parts of Genesis and Exodus and the, *The Way of Salvation* in Kui were already available and read by people.

The distribution of books and the Bibles was regular and systematic. They reached the children in schools and hostels among whom reading and writing were regular; many boys and girls became Christian first in their families before their parents. An effective and regular distribution aimed to put the Bible in the hands of every Kui. The written word and the Bible, aided by literacy initiatives, played an important part in conversion, particularly when the break-through was made by the literate few who wanted to become Christian after reading the Gospel books followed by counselling by the local evangelist.

The role of written communication compared with other modes was limited in the conversion movement but nevertheless was foundational to the spread of the gospel. Converts interviewed testified to receiving the Christian message through the printed word or the reading of the Bible and Christian literature. The printed word as the source of their Christian knowledge and its message was one building-brick for their conversion.

### 1. 'It is written in the Bible so we believe it'

In general conversation it is common to hear from Christian converts that they believe in such and such in Christianity because it is written in the Bible. The Book has been accepted as authoritative and its words are quoted by the pastors and leaders expressing Christian privileges, promises and duty. The truth in the written word was also a motivation to accept Christianity. Now the Bible in Kui and also in Oriya offered direction, promises, assurances and spiritual examples as an authoritative basis for the new way.

Three interviewees made specific reference to the Bible and Christian books as the source of their knowledge of Christianity, instrumental in persuading them to accept the faith. The first person is a Kondh man, 68 years and a relatively rich landowner of the village Rutungia. He used to perform occasional buffalo sacrifice and brew his own liquor employing a Pan servant, which were signs of his prosperity. He is semi-literate, self-taught as an adult and had not attended school. His reading skill was just meagre but through the help of his close friend, a Pan

postman and drinking companion, he read the New Testament and was converted through the reading.

He has a strong sense of his local religion and was proud about it. The quoted interview below refers to one incident that became a turning point for him. This happened when he was visiting his sister who had just lost her small daughter. His sister and her husband were newly converted to Roman Catholic Christianity and he was not happy with his sister's conversion. In his thinking, and also for other Kondhs, the Christian religion was Pan religion, and was not for Kondhs, even though he had a close Pan friend:

I decided to return home soon after the visit. There was not much talk between us. It was raining heavily and there was a flash flood. The river I had to cross on my return had a boat but I needed someone to help me crossover. My sister's husband knew that and came with me to put me across to the other side. Before I could get down on the other side he pushed a Christian tract into my pocket. None of us talked. I reached home and the next day I tried to read it. Though it was in Kui, I could not understand much. It was about the Creation story, of the creator God and his great creation of sun, moon, star, mountains, forests and all what our eyes could see are created by God. He created and he provides. All these my neighbour and friend Dulabh Degalo explained to me. He was the first Christian of this area, he was a postal runner and he could read better.

I was surprised to note this and thought what kind of a God is this, he doesn't eat anything. Not even an egg. I was offering all kinds of animals all round the year because I have much paddy growing land and I had to do a lot of sacrifice, including a buffalo some years. However I kept reading it repeatedly, the story was irresistibly attractive. Then I asked my friend Dulabh to get me a Bible. It was quite difficult to get one in our place. But because of his contact with Rev Henry in Baliguda, he got me one Kui Bible. I kept reading but I needed Dulabh's help to explain. I even used to bribe Dulabh with little drink (fine *Mahuli*) to come and discuss and explain to me. This became quite regular. We used to drink together; he drinks little not as much as me. One day I was reading on my own and I came to a place where it strongly prohibited drinking liquor. I don't remember where it is. I called Dulabh to explain what it means. Dulabh initially hesitated to say anything but on my insisting he said drinking is prohibited here. We both kept silent for a while. Then we both decided that we would quit drinking. We took a vow and repeated three times, "we shall not drink", we shall not drink, we shall not drink". And we left drinking. I became a Christian later. It was Dulabh who made me a Christian. He was Pan and I am a Kondh but we were thick of friends. He is gone now...<sup>42</sup>

The written piece or pamphlet seems clearly an instigation to him to think or re-think whatever he already knew or did not know about Christian religion. He did have a negative idea about Christianity as a religion for the Pan or low castes. Secondly, he was annoyed that his sister had become a Christian against his wishes.

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<sup>42</sup> Interview # 9.



But he did not express any anti-feeling against the church or mission or any establishment and propagating machinery like the books, tracts or Bibles. The written material was accepted as an impersonal piece of information or knowledge. Written pages helped in the reading for oneself, for reflection and thinking. The written word had a quieter but significant role. The mission too believed that in the printed words 'elements of improvement are quietly and vigorously at work'.

He was a well-to-do and leading person of the village and he wanted to read the Kui New Testament for himself and understand its message. His approach and actions, like his eagerness to read in spite of limited literacy, the partnership in reading with the friend, wrestling with the message of the book and discussing together clearly speaks of a rational and independent mind. His insistence on reading the Bible in detail also suggests his independent mind; the written word played a decisive role in his conversion decision. The reading sessions, searching for meaning, understanding and even his response in obedience are striking evidence of serious engagement with the Bible and its message. The book met his intellectual interest and there seems to be a fascination with the printed text.

It should be acknowledged that there was an element of quiet persuasion from his recently converted sister, brother-in-law and the Pan friend who was his reading-cum-drinking partner. "It was Dulabh who made me a Christian." was an emotional and nostalgic tribute to a close friend whom he trusted to guide him in his own conversion and who is no more. The close friendship between a Kondh and a Pan is not unusual and acknowledged quite frankly. A personal as well as collective reading and thinking of the text and a clear decision making process was involved in this conversion. This testimony stands against any simplistic interpretation of tribal conversion as mindless capitulation to Christianity on economic or material accounts.

His understanding of the Bible may seem to be shallow, with its emphasis on drinking. Yet the limited time for the interview only allowed the decisive step leading to conversion to be proudly highlighted. His understanding of the Christian text is from his theological perspective. What interested him first and foremost about the Christian God is about his food: 'a god who does not eat'. The sacrifices to the spirits involving mainly food was central concept of his belief. The wellbeing and protection of all depended on fulfilling that obligation. There is nothing more central than the sacrifices which were the offerings of food for the spirits or deities. Any god not requiring this basic thing is a strange god and this is what struck him first.

For the enquiring mind the written word was an appropriate source of new knowledge and ideas. In this case the printed knowledge instigated and influenced the imagination and ultimately led to conversion.

## 2. Bible as a god-object

The interview quoted below is a narrative from a senior Kui church leader already quoted in this chapter. He was a leading figure of the church during the conversion movement who not only was a witness to it but who himself baptised hundreds of people. He led evangelistic teams in preaching tours of the villages. When I asked what he thought about the reasons for the large scale Kondh conversions, he listed a number of major causes and one of them, as he saw, was this particular role of the Bible, though in a quite different way.

One of the key factors in the rapid conversion was the effectiveness of the Bible to replace the old spirit objects that were increasingly falling out of favour due to the growing Christian influence. People in remote places became Christian by themselves often without the presence and help of a pastor or evangelist. The Bible or New Testament translated in Kui was a very effective replacement for the former gods who had to be disposed of in haste and sometimes without a pastor or evangelist or senior Christian's help, who could not be available immediately. Bible was used in this way as an object having power. They innovated it.<sup>43</sup>

The Bible was a tangible Christian emblem and it was useful and needed for the visible presence of the Christian god. The Bible was believed to invoke the presence of the invisible power. This represented a practical and fundamental need of the people in transition in their faith. In the Kui belief the visible and invisible interchange and overlap. So if the Bible contains the words of ultimate importance it can not be just a book or object, but a living source of divinity. Pastors and evangelist claimed their message from the Book and the book was perceived as being above the persons. In Kui perception the separation of the book of the Bible from its divinity, power and authority was unthinkable.

To missionaries such use of the Bible was highly controversial and unacceptable. Such a reception of the Word of God was contrary to the intended objective of the mission. Though they did not penalise such a use, they did disapprove of it.

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<sup>43</sup> Interview # 40.

### 3. 'Bible says if a Christian dies he will rise again'

One interviewee spelled out this as the message that turned him to Christianity at a crisis moment in his life. He had completed High school. His school headmaster was a Christian and had helped him to read the Bible and explained its message. When his brother of 10 years old died suddenly that created a crisis in his life and this experience also became a turning point for him.

Our headmaster Dhanial Mallick was a Christian. He used to read the Bible to us and also sing Christian songs. Even outside school hours I used to go to him during evenings, sometimes for tuition. I also got to read his Bible. My brother died when he was in class 4<sup>th</sup>. His death made me very sad. But this teacher told me to read the Bible because only Bible says if a Christian dies he will rise again. I was also afraid of my own death. I have seen other children dying in this village. I liked the Bible verse where it says if a Christian dies he will rise again. After I finished 5<sup>th</sup> class I was baptised. I went to Gudripori hostel to study further and I have passed Matric. I told my parents to become Christian and they also became Christian.<sup>44</sup>

This is a testimony to a specific answer from the Bible, a relevant message at the moment of need. As said before, Christian teachers played a vital role as messengers of Christianity. As knowledgeable and informed persons in remote areas they often exercised considerable influence over people of the area. People came to them to receive counselling and advice in a crisis or even casually. Many of these teachers were the first to introduce the Bible or gospel books to their students or to people in the area. And as true Baptist Christians they frequently referred to Bible proof texts or claimed the word or will of God from it.

Death struck quite frequently in these areas and unlike in normal situations where the old die here the children were frequent victims. Infant mortality was high and a major problem. The sick and dying needed medicine, healing but also at a deeper level needed answer and assurance to the question of death. The Bible's message of resurrection has been fundamentally relevant and useful in answering the question. The resurrection message has been and remains a powerful message of Christianity. The concept of heaven or living ancestors is in many religions. But the resurrection of the dead who believe in Christ comes as a concrete concept and answer from the Bible. The Bible brought a different and acceptable answer to the most difficult question and unacceptable reality like death.

The overall impact of written or printed Christian knowledge was limited, reading was not widespread and not many converts would directly refer to the written

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<sup>44</sup> Interview # 26.

Bible or Christian books as the source of their Christian knowledge or where they found their message or reason for conversion. However, the written word and the written Bible had a wider and foundational role. The introduction to writing and access to an instrument of the elite was Christian mission work. It mediated a transition to a new culture of the written word. And as a medium of communication it carried the Christian message and the Bible as an object of power represented the Christian god.

The written word had a silent impact. It created a culture of private or semi-private reading and reflection which in turn instigated and fostered a spirit of enquiry. The printed words had the obvious advantage of repetition and permanency over against the spoken word. It led the readers to grapple with the materials of Christian propagation and modern information in private and over time, returning to it again and again. In other words, people could continuously read the books and be increasingly influenced by the contents and message.

## E. Dissemination through Distribution of Books

The last but not the least factor in the impact of the written word, whether of the Bible or of other Christian books and pamphlets, was through the dissemination of the message of Christianity through its regular and vigorous distribution. Distribution has helped in the dissemination of the message by placing the book in the hands of people. Why was literature distribution so important? Printing the Bible and books was not an end in itself, for it needed to reach in the hands of people scattered in a large mostly inaccessible area, its people isolated from the news and information of the outside world. The Baptist Mission's mass printing, mass distribution and books in the language of the masses, ushered in the age of mass media in India. This media enterprise was also a literature ministry, Christian communication through the written or printed word. The printed pages were a major medium of Christian communication, often forming a separate department of mission and with personnel and planning for literature ministry. Book circulation had a multiplying effect, being shared, circulated and passed on from one to other or reading in the groups.

### 1. Literature Distribution

In the Kondh hills mission literature distribution involved a full-time person in charge of literature ministry, planning for sale and distribution of books. A

bookseller called colporteur was specially assigned to full-time work of book distribution and toured the hills. The evangelists and pastors who also travelled widely carried some tracts and books with them. Book sales were organised during Church gatherings or annual meetings such as the *Deri Sabha* (Great Meeting), besides in weekly markets and village streets. In the Mission Schools, in the hostels and in the Hospital Christian books were distributed or sold from time to time. New Testaments with hymns printed at the back of it were distributed to hostel students, some receiving them as prizes in school competitions. Students carried the books home and read to their parents and others not literate. In the Mission hospital patients were encouraged to read books available in the hospital's book shelf. Lily Quy, who led the Adult Literacy mission in Orissa for many years wrote, "At the Moorshead Memorial Hospital ...one bedridden patient was helping many to learn, and kept a box of books for sale or loan, on his bed. The hymn book is a favourite primer..."<sup>45</sup> Sometimes patients used to read aloud sitting on their bed or squatting on the floor. After discharge from the hospital some patients took Christian books home where others in the villages could get to read these books.

In fact the Baptist mission endeavoured to introduce a book culture as books appeared in most of its works, whether hospital or hostel or Christian gatherings, the books became the mark of Christianity.

## 2. Book Display

Book displays were planned and organised to attract attention and advertise them. Book sales were organised through displays of books in villages using some one's veranda, on the bonnet of a Mission Jeep, hung on a tree trunk or even at the back of an upturned rope cot. The hospital experimented with a book trolley, loaded with books and well displayed doing the rounds in the hospital ward. Evangelists carried them in bags and held them up to display them. The pictures of village book sales appear in many issues of the BMS magazine.

## 3. Books in Easy Reach

Books were often cheap or distributed free which facilitated and fostered reading. Moreover they could be passed on from hand to hand, circulating long after the distribution was done. Access to the written message was easy through the

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<sup>45</sup> Quy, Lily. "Village Christians Learn to Read" (In her annual report to the Adult Education Committee) in *Baptist Missionary Herald*, September 1958, pp. 134-135.



pamphlets and printed word. The mission did experiment with other ways of communication, through tape recorders or disc recorder. However, books were easier, cheaper and enduring.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we saw that the written word was a major mode of gospel communication of the mission. The written word was heavily emphasised by the Baptist Mission, and in the Kondh hills much attention and effort was devoted to developing literacy and promoting gospel communication through the printed word. The role of Kui literature in the Christianisation process which largely remains unnoticed, was nevertheless a major mode of gospel communication and its impact is seen in Christian conversion. The written word which reached to the Kui in their own language was Christian.

Writing gave a new identity and status to the Kui language, comparable to other written languages. The Kui Bible was its new symbol and a new cultural identity. The Bible was also the prominent symbol of their Christian identity and proudly possessed by both literates and non-literate converts. With writing the concept of the legitimacy and formal status of the written word capable of communicating truth entered Kui thinking. The print also had the strength of permanency, self-circulation and easy access.

The Bible had the special role as the Word of God and as a god-object, the Book itself as well as its message, being considered powerful. There has been to some extent a personification and objectification of the book in the conversion process and this was due to the innovative and pragmatic approach of the converts themselves. The Bible played a key role in the conversion movement by effectively replacing the spirit-objects and aiding in conversion.

The printed word intellectually engaged the Kui mind, the converts encountering Christianity in the written/printed word in addition to the other modes through which the message was communicated. The Bible introduced the gospel message and books brought information and knowledge from outside the Kui traditional world. Exposure to both was a challenge to Kui traditional thinking and living.

However the written word, as a whole was limited as literacy remained low. The written word played a foundational role, being read in public to mixed gathering, and making a quiet impression as a private medium.

## Chapter Five

### Education as Expression of Christian Mission

*No one, who knows the history of missions, can doubt that missionaries were pioneers of education wherever they went...nor can it be doubted how important a part education has played in the process of evangelization.*

Edinburgh 1910<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Education was an integral part of the Baptist mission and in fact missionaries were the ‘real pioneers of western education in India’.<sup>2</sup> And this education work was part of a comprehensive written culture that was promoted by the Christian missions. As Daniel Potts puts it, “Around the merry-go-round of translation, literature, journalism and printing revolved the (mission) school network.”<sup>3</sup> So, like the vernacular Bible or Christian literature, discussed in the previous chapter, mission education was an important and useful agent of Christianisation among the Kui. In tribal conversion, education and the intellect was very much a part of the process and attention needs to be paid to this aspect in conversion.

A basic function of mission education had been to enable reading of the Bible, and in a more dynamic way it was to aid in evangelism, in the enlightenment and training of the Christian community and in the permeation of society at large with the principles of Christian morals and truth.<sup>4</sup> This was the expressed purpose of missionary education drafted in the first world missionary conference in Edinburgh-1910. The well known Scottish missionary and pioneer educationist in Bengal, Alexander Duff, stressed the *preparatio evangelica* role of mission education but believed in the percolation effect: educational influence would go down the flow of social control from the top.<sup>5</sup> But the actual missionary method and attention in education largely focused on grass roots and primary level, though higher education

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<sup>1</sup> Edinburgh 1910: *World Missionary Conference Commission Three: Education in Relation to the Christianisation of National Life*. Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, no date, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Keay, F E and Karve, D D. *A History of Education in India and Pakistan* (4<sup>th</sup> Edition), Calcutta: OUP, 1964, p.198.

<sup>3</sup> Potts, Daniel. E. *Baptist Missionaries in India, 1793-1837: The History of Serampore and Its Mission*. Cambridge: CUP, 1967, p.114.

<sup>4</sup> Edinburgh 1910: *Commission Three, Education in Relation to Christianisation*...pp. 369-377.

<sup>5</sup> Duff, A. *India and the India Missions*. Edinburgh: John Johnstone, MDCCCXXXIX, pp. 346-358.

institutions were also established by missionaries. More importantly, mission education was extended to the untouchable low castes, tribals and women who had lower social status and no formal education. Mission education may not have been a highly successful agent of conversion as the majority of its beneficiaries were and remained non-Christian but it has been an agent of cultural change and effective western Christian influence, emphasising science and rationality, on Indian society at large.<sup>6</sup> Among the tribals, education accelerated integration with non-tribals and also caused change in their traditional world view.

Mission schools in the Kondh hills did play an important role in Kui education and evangelisation. The Kui, who had had nothing to do with writing or schools, came to appropriate this new culture including its Christian content and values. Kui medium Mission schools attracted students as against the government's Oriya schools. Higher education being in Oriya with some English, those two languages also became fashionable with the educated. Beyond spreading literacy and aiding evangelism, education gave the Kui Church its leaders and pastors, and moreover, produced a new crop of professionals acquiring a high class identity and a raised status. Many trained Christian teachers found employment in government schools and many of them exerted Christian influence in such frontiers of mission. Particularly the Pan Christian teachers' new elite status was a radical transformation of their social rank and worth.

My aim in this chapter is to locate mission education in the sphere of Christian communication and identify its agency in Kui socio-religious change. I shall particularly examine the Mission's education work that comprised school teaching, vernacular medium, books, hostel routine and Christian teachers. First I shall briefly trace the historical and theological foundations of educational mission that justified education as Christian mission and therefore as an agent of Christianisation. I shall examine and assess the educational mission's role as a source and channel of Christian knowledge, morals, ideas, influence and its institutions, transmitting Christian values and beliefs along with factual knowledge, skills of literacy and numeracy to the mostly non-Christian pupils.

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<sup>6</sup> See Ingleby, J C. *Education as Missionary Tool: A Study in Christian Missionary Education by English Protestant Missionaries in India with Special Reference to Cultural Change*. Ph D Thesis. Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. Oxford, 1998.

## A. Educational Mission: A Christian Imperative

Christian missions' educational involvement was neither incidental nor was it solely aimed at conversion. If it had been, then schools would have closed down when it became apparent that education was not leading to the desired objective of the mission. But the missions' educational and social engagements were integrally scriptural, historical and part of the broader mission of the church in the world. Educational involvement has been a part of the Christian church from the beginning and originated with the mission of Jesus in the Bible where he is not only the Guru and the Messiah but also commissioned his followers to become teachers of the Way and engage in good works. Therefore Christian mission tries to exemplify this role of Christ as the teacher and healer through its educational and medical care mission wherever possible, as well as through preaching.

### 1. Education as Christian Vocation and Mission

Christ in the gospels is pre-eminently the Teacher who at the beginning of his ministry gathers a group of disciples—literally learners—and consistently teaches them and sometimes the general audience, about the will of God and his own mission. He set a pedagogic example by choosing his disciples and calling them to a life-long teacher-learner relationship. He was popular for his method of communication in which he taught the profound truths of the Kingdom of God and his own mission through simple stories called parables.<sup>7</sup> His disciples and the general followers regularly address him as *Rabboni* (Aramaic for teacher or guru)<sup>8</sup> and as the guru he not only taught but he was an example to them, doing and believing what he taught. In the account of John, Jesus the guru washed the feet of his disciples and then told them, “You call me Teacher and Lord, and it is right that you do so, because that is what I am. I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet. You, then, should wash one another’s feet. I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you.” (John 13: 13-15 TEV). The guru’s community of followers became the church and as learners they were expected to carry forward their Lord’s teaching as he had taught them.

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<sup>7</sup> For discussions on parables as a communication method see Joshva, R. J. *Parables and Principles of Christian Communication: A Study of the Parable of the Good Samaritan from an Interactive Perspective and its Relevance to Christian Media Practice, with Particular Reference to the South Indian context*, Ph D Thesis submitted to the University of Edinburgh, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> See Deane, Anthony C. *Rabboni: A Study of Jesus Christ the Teacher*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1921.

Paul, the church-theologian and missionary, undertook many missionary journeys throughout the Roman Empire, preaching and teaching. He is known for his epistolary method of communication to teach a scattered Church community which he himself established by advising, admonishing and edifying, besides giving theological or Christological sermons. Paul the teacher went beyond the historical or theological content when he said, "...brothers, all that is true, all that is noble, all that is just and pure, all that is loveable and gracious, whatever is excellent and admirable...fill all your thoughts with these things. Whatever you learned and received or heard or seen in me, do." (Philippians. 4: 8-9 NEB). The church for centuries has taken up the teaching of the Gospel and also the education of society.

After the fall of the Roman Empire the Church increasingly took on the educational role upon itself<sup>9</sup> and "throughout the Middle Ages, education was under the complete control of the Church."<sup>10</sup> Hence the church's Christian education ministry is the logical and historical outcome of this earlier role in education. The church therefore has a theology of education. It involves itself directly, and through the Mission bodies which came to be known as the para-churches, in the education of people both within and outside its fold. Describing Christian education, Rupert Davies says "The enlightened teaching of the Bible, the Christian Faith, the history of Christianity, the meaning of non-Christian faiths, and the application of faith, Christian and non-Christian, to ethics, economics, politics and social life, is integral to education."<sup>11</sup> And Christian influence in education could be through

one, in the presence on the staff of as many schools and colleges as possible of those who will bring Christian judgement to bear on the whole life of their community; two, in the existence of schools and colleges, teaching-and-training communities which are organised and maintained with the deliberate purpose, among others, of embodying Christian ideals and judgements--to be examples of what education is when it is conducted in this way."<sup>12</sup>

Therefore education remained a vital and inescapable mission engagement and a Christian duty and imperative. Out of this understanding, the Christian Missions have emerged as pioneers and providers of education at many levels and in different fields of study. However, the practice was not always so clear. Some

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<sup>9</sup> Boyd, William and King, Edmund J. *The History of Western Education*. Tenth Edition. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1972, pp. 99-123.

<sup>10</sup> Cruickshank, Marjorie. *Church and State in English Education 1870 to the Present Day*. London: Macmillan and Co, 1964, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Davies Rupert E. *A Christian Theology of Education*. Surrey: Denholm House Press, 1974, p. 107

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. pp. 107-108.



individual missionaries believed preaching was their primary business and education secondary.<sup>13</sup> In India the Baptists were not the first to bring western education, but the Baptists and the successive mission societies pioneered mass education. Traditionally education had been a privilege of a few among the higher castes but missionary education was opened up to all indiscriminately and often deliberately took care to side with the unprivileged and the untouchables.

## 2. Missionaries and Education: Indian Origin

The missionaries were pioneers in popularising education for the masses with their vernacular printing and introduction of school education in villages and remote areas where they worked. But more importantly, they brought education to those to whom it was denied, the outcastes, the tribals and women. The Portuguese Roman Catholics first introduced western education in Goa in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch Protestant mission in Ceylon did so in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the German Lutherans connected with the Danish mission set up schools in South India not long after their arrival in 1706.<sup>14</sup> The Portuguese mission had a school and orphanage as early as 1514 and 29 boys were studying in the first school.<sup>15</sup> The German Lutherans, Benjamin Schultze (in 1720) and Christian Frederick Schwartz (in 1750) worked vigorously for education.<sup>16</sup> The first British initiative was made by the East India Company in 1813 through the efforts of Christian evangelicals on its board, like William Wilberforce and Charles Grant. Missionary work, prohibited before, was now granted permission on application, and the Company also agreed to undertake responsibility for education. This was at a time when "even in Britain in those days it had not come to be recognised that it was the duty of a government to provide education."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For example, Amos Sutton of the Orissa Mission felt education should not be undertaken at the cost of preaching because "for missionaries, few in number as they are, to forsake the work for which Christ sent them forth viz., 'preaching of the gospel to every creature' to superintend schools, appears to him as an act of unfaithfulness." But the same Orissa Mission went on to establish two high schools, one teachers' training school, one Bible school, one college and a few primary schools in the vicinity of the Mission centre itself! Sutton, A. *Mission to India*. Boston: David Marks, 1833, p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> Keay, F E. *A History of Education in India and Pakistan* (4<sup>th</sup> Edition). Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1964, p. 198.

<sup>15</sup> Mundadan, M. *History of Christianity in India, Volume I: From Beginning Up to the Middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century*. Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1984, p. 452.

<sup>16</sup> Neill, Stephen. *A History of Christianity in India 1707-1858*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 28-58.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200. The church carried out the bulk of elementary education in England and Scotland, and the Kirk especially had undisputed authority over educational foundations. See Cruickshank, Marjorie. *Church and State in English Education 1870 to the Present Day*. London: Macmillan & Co, 1964, p. 1.

European schools were first established by private individuals for the children of the Company's European settlers. These children were mostly Anglo-Indians from the inter-marriages of Europeans with the local population, and the schools were privately funded.<sup>18</sup> The Company now made a provision for setting aside £10,000 each year for education and books for the civilian population.<sup>19</sup> The entry of missionaries after 1813 was a boost to the situation and the landmark Macaulay minute of 1835 changed education in India forever with the introduction of western education as a standard for Indian schools and English as the medium of instruction in High Schools. Carey started his first school just a year after his arrival and taught 'reading, writing, arithmetic, the local accounting system and Christianity'. Education was expanded under Marshman, and in 1816-1817, in a fifteen month period, "no less than 103 elementary schools with 6,703 regular pupils" were established.<sup>20</sup> The all-India scenario by 1853, as Keay describes it was that "there were less than 30,000 students in government educational institutions whereas in Mission schools there were *ten times* as many."<sup>21</sup>

Missionary elementary education reached the rural common masses and the deprived sector—the low castes, hill tribes and women. Missionary educationists believed it was the Christian gospel and western rationality that would arouse India from the social stagnation and disability from which its vast masses of the deprived sections suffered. Some social reformists who emerged from the low castes, converted or not, were affected by the Christian gospel and thinking. A social radical like Jotirao Phule, mission-educated and a friend of missionaries, who remained a Hindu, described Christian enlightenment as "opening the third eye", "*Tritiya Nayan*" and established the Satyasodhak Samaj (Truth-seeking Society) for the emancipation of the low castes. The Baptist Mission in Cuttack established some of the major educational institutions in Orissa and carried out the work with missionary spirit and zeal. They emphasised vernacular education at primary level, and in the Kondh hills they began to establish Kui medium schools when all government schools there were using Oriya.

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<sup>18</sup> Keay, F E. *A History of Education*, p. 199. For an interesting reading of the 18<sup>th</sup> century British-Anglo-Indian relationship and life see Dalrymple, William. *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-century India*. London: Flamingo, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>20</sup> Laird, M A. *Missionaries and Education in Bengal 1793-1837*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1972, p. 72.

<sup>21</sup> Keay, F E. *A History of Education*, p. 204.

## B. Kui Tribal Learning and Introduction of School Education

Kui education consisted of tribal ways of learning. The elders effectively passed on knowledge, skills and traditional duties in action and example to the younger ones who, by imitation, memory and practice, learned the folk ways, mores, tradition, art, social norms and taboos from a very young age. Learning took place at different levels and circles of association such as in the family, in peer groups and from the elders. The emphasis was on empirical or experiential knowledge and skills of agriculture, traditional-religious art and forest living. But learning and practices were also intellectual, aesthetic, imaginative and perceptive. Early anthropologists, influenced by evolutionary theory, believed the aboriginal or tribal represented minds capable of concrete thought only. The views of Levy-Bruhl of 'primitive or prelogical mentality' or of Heinz Werner's primitive psychology describing the tribal mind as effectively stuck in childhood have been challenged for decades from empirical findings, but even today, the idea of the 'primitive' is still engraved in the minds of administrators, policy makers and lay persons.<sup>22</sup> The eminent Indian sociologist Ghurye preferred to categorise India's tribals as 'backward Hindus', a term which besides being pejorative is also erroneous and misleading from the tribal point of view.<sup>23</sup> The tribal people have a culture of their own, they have developed their own political structure and unwritten legislation to govern them. These elaborate political, moral and behavioural codes of practice presuppose an intellectual and abstract faculty on a par with that of any other people.

Tribal administration, justice, jurisdiction of power, alliance, and moral and ritual codes were communicated in action or learnt by example, observation, memory and practice. Barbara Boal found that the Kondh ritual system was to seek and sustain cosmic wellbeing and the wellbeing of the family and village. A calendrical cycle of rituals was performed to fulfil the required duty towards ensuring good relations between people, the gods and the land.<sup>24</sup> These are complex, elaborate and imaginative. The Kui priesthood, which is not necessarily hereditary, carries out the long standing ritual tradition and the priestly function with skill and experience.

Boal asserts, "Nor was their intellectual stamina any less when one considers their ability to adopt new practices like paddy-growing while rejecting the Hinduism

<sup>22</sup> See Levy-Bruhl, Lucien. *Primitive Mentality*. (Tr. by A Clare from *L'ame Primitive* (1927). Boston: Beacon Press, 1966 and Werner, Heinz. *Comparative Psychology of Mental Development*. NY: International University Press, 1948.

<sup>23</sup> Ghurye, G S. *The Scheduled Tribes of India*. London: Transaction Books, 1980.

<sup>24</sup> Boal, Barbara. *Man, The Gods and the Search for Cosmic Wellbeing: Over One Hundred and Fifty Years of Kondh Rites 1835-1992*. Bhubaneswar: Niswass, 1999.

in which its arrival was wrapped; or their radical re-thinking of the implications of their own theology following the abandonment of human sacrifice."<sup>25</sup> So alongside the continuation of and adhering to traditional culture, adaptation and change that was deemed necessary and relevant took place.

With regard to school education, the Kui initially showed a lack of interest and even rejected reading and writing and a class-room system of schooling. Spending the best part of the day sitting within four walls of a room practicing Oriya alphabets under the gaze of an Oriya teacher was in no way interesting to them and they were resistant to such school education.<sup>26</sup> Even though schools began to be established by 1851 by Frye and MacDonald, the progress was extremely slow, and by 1854 MacDonald found them in 'deplorable' condition. The administrators for whom skills of literacy were the yard stick of civilisation viewed its rejection by the Kui as evidence of their ignorance and even superstition. "The opposition was most intense. Words can scarcely convey an adequate idea of the scorn and contempt manifested especially by the elders of the tribes. This was to be expected; their eyes had grown dim in their old delusions..." bemoaned Campbell.<sup>27</sup> Behera who quotes the colonial government records uncritically said, "The Kondhs of Baro, Atharamutha and Huzoghoru opposed the introduction of school education on most flimsy and superstitious grounds"<sup>28</sup> and goes on to say "the Kondhs totally failed to understand the importance of education" on grounds of superstition and blind faith.<sup>29</sup>

But the fact remained that school education for the Kui was, and still remains, in Oriya from the beginning. Macpherson in 1844 wrote, "I now see my way to a beginning of schools among the Khonds, and am deeply engaged in getting up an Oriya spelling-book, and a First Book of Universal Religion and Morals for them."<sup>30</sup> Schools which the government set up for the Kui were all in Oriya medium. And the teachers too, who were mostly from the plains, were Oriya. Moreover, the Oriya teachers normally regarded the Pan and Kondh as low, backward and untouchable, making their feelings particularly clear. Education in a second language was difficult enough and that the teachers looked down on them made matters even worse. The

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<sup>25</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Konds: Human Sacrifice*, p. 222.

<sup>26</sup> Patnaik, Nihar R. "Growth of Education Among the Kandha Tribe in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century" in *Adivasi*, vol. XXXII, No. 3, September (1992), pp. 5-13.

<sup>27</sup> Campbell, Major-General John. *A Personal Narrative*...pp. 178-179.

<sup>28</sup> Behera, D. *The Bhanjas*...p. 162.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Padel, *The Sacrifice*, p.71.

Kui deeply distrusted the Oriyas, both as outsiders and as lackeys of the white government.

Teachers from the plains accepted postings in Kondh schools in the hills reluctantly. And they had their personal problems too. One administrative officer wrote from the memoir of his service in the hills:

The teachers from the plains are at present a veritable problem to the educational system in the area. They have their own affairs in the plains to attend and look after their families in the plains...They generally go without taking formal leave, leaving the school in charge of a co-worker. The Headmaster of the school connives at it. The Dy. Inspector generally closes his eyes to the unauthorised leave. This goes on by turns, another teacher going home to the plains on the return of the teacher who had gone earlier...The tribal who is not very anxious to send his children to school does not mind the frequent absence of the teachers. Moreover if at all he complains he would complain to the Dy. Inspector of schools who generally ignores such complaints. The net result of such complaints is that the children of the Kondh get harsh treatment from the teacher.<sup>31</sup>

So there was a systemic failure too. Fear among the pupils of harsh teachers was a real factor: not surprisingly, two of my interview participants gave their reasons for dropping out of primary school as the cruelty of some teachers. Day school education also took children away from work in the field and at home. The parents generally did not see any immediate benefit of schools for their children. Mojumdar comments,

the real beneficiaries of the government's educational programme were the non-tribals, not the tribals; increasing number of schools in the tribal tracts was thus no indicator of the level of literacy among the local aboriginals...had little relevance to the grim economic realities of tribal life...who naturally preferred sending their wards to the fields or road construction sites to schools to learn three Rs... (Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic).<sup>32</sup>

But nevertheless changes in attitude to education gradually came. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were clear changes taking place in those children who had gone to school and had interacted with Oriya students. They showed changes in "personal cleanliness and a desire to wear clothes purchased from the plains in Oriya fashion" and also a desire to speak the Oriya language.<sup>33</sup>

The missionaries began to set up schools from 1909 and these schools attracted more Kui children and even some girls. The mastermind was Oliver J

<sup>31</sup> Patnaik, U N. "Observations of an administrative officer in the Kondh Hills in the Early Forties" in *Adivasi: A Journal of Anthropological Research*, vol. XXIV, Nos. 1 & 2, April-July (1984), p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Mojumdar, K. *Changing Tribal Life in British Orissa*. New Delhi: Kavery Books, 1998, pp. 119-20.

<sup>33</sup> Mojumdar, K. *Changing Tribal Life...* pp. 120-21.



Millman who began a systematic expansion of education. He was innovative with his Kui medium instruction and the introduction of the Roman script instead of the Oriya used so far. Millman's idea was to separate the Kui from Oriya influence and mould them under Christian influence. He was successful in arousing Kui interest in schools and literacy. He claimed that while the government schools complained about lack of attendance, he had no such problem in his schools: "Government officials say the Khonds do not want schools, yet week after week we have requests from distant villages for teachers to be sent out to them."<sup>34</sup>

## C. Mission School Education: Approach and Main Features

### 1. The Beginning and Foundation

The earliest mission-educated were the Meria children who went to the Mission orphanages in Berhampore or Cuttack and attended school there. Some of them were used as teachers in the hills schools.<sup>35</sup> Mission education in the hills, however, began in 1908 by Millman who was sent from the Serampore College to set up schools among the Kui. The first school was started under a tree in the Mallikapodi village consisting of Kui-Pans and some tribal Kondhs, and the school was attended by children, men and even some women. "The pupils gathered in the morning for ordinary school work, while in the afternoon a few young men were given special instruction."<sup>36</sup> Millman's schools were in the Kui medium, unlike the government schools which were Oriya, and he used the Roman script instead of the Oriya used so far. He produced a new series of books and primers in Kui for his schools, and he translated more New Testament books like Luke, John and Romans using the Roman script with the help of some of his bright and promising students. These were used as texts for reading and writing exercises.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *BMS Report*, London: Carey Press, 1910, p. 64.

<sup>35</sup> The first missionary, Goadby, had used a rescued Meria as his interpreter. He had also set up a school in Russellkonda, in the plains and Wilkinson had taught there and wrote some textbooks in Kui.

<sup>36</sup> Wells, D S. *Ye Are My Witnesses: The Works of BMS in India During 150 Years 1792-1942*. Calcutta: BMS Press, 1942, p. 131.

<sup>37</sup> Millman, O J. "Our Kond Students" in *Baptist Missionary Herald*, August (1918) 107. There is some confusion about his conversion. While Boal clearly says that Kogera never became a Christian (Boal, 1999-p.ii), Millman's report introduced him as 'earnest Christian' and Felix Padel says he was one of the first evangelists of the Mission.

Millman's progress attracted government attention. His system was introduced in government schools and his text books were accepted and published by the government.<sup>38</sup>

The Bengal government sanctioned the use of three of his Kui books (two of them arithmetic books). The Madras Government was starting to recruit the Kui as teachers. In 1915 a boarding school was going up. The Mission school was the only school in Phulbani District teaching up to 5<sup>th</sup> standard. By 1917 all the 70 Government schools in the District had adopted his principle and some of his pupils had gone to Government High School.<sup>39</sup>

He also established a night school for adults and a boys' boarding school;<sup>40</sup> and he set up a Mission Education Board for the state of Orissa to represent the educational interests of the native Christians to the government.<sup>41</sup> His promising students became teachers and the mainstay of the education work he had established. Pearce Carey summarised Millman's vision:

The aim of Millman and his colleagues was, of course, vastly more than to satisfy Government Inspectors and to win Government grants... They were missionaries. Education was inspired by an evangelism. They were keen to teach their scholars, and through them eventually all the Hill Tracts, the wisdom, grace and way of Christ.<sup>42</sup>

But by 1919 Millman had to leave due to his wife's illness (they had already lost their infant daughter who died from malaria). By then he had already trained enough teachers, including one female teacher Subarani, for the three Primary schools and one Middle school he had established. His teachers also went to work in many government schools. Wells writes,

Before 1908 there were hardly any hillmen who were teachers. Now 40% of teachers in Government schools are hillmen and some of these are Christians and practically all have passed through Mission schools. The influence of Christian teachers in places where there are no evangelists can hardly be over estimated. Not only they have won many converts but they also have planted churches in those places.<sup>43</sup>

In the course of the mission, 14 schools were established. The prime days of mission schools lasted until the 1940s, after which the mission lost its emphasis on education

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<sup>38</sup> Padel, Felix. *The Sacrifice of Human Being*, p. 194.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 220.

<sup>40</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Kondhs*, p. 181.

<sup>41</sup> Carey, Pearce. *Dawn on the Kond hills*, p. 64.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 66-67.

<sup>43</sup> Wells, D S. *Ye Are My Witnesses*, p. 131.

and schools began to be handed over to the government (with the exception of the three in the Gudripodi region, nearer to the mission bungalow with boarding facilities). The use of Roman script, however, was not very popular and was not continued much longer after Millman. Similarly the Kui medium which was only used in a few mission schools and at primary level came under increasing pressure from Oriya and was replaced by Oriya medium when more and more Kui wanted to go for higher education beyond primary level.

## 2. The Main Features and Emphasis

From 1909 until the late 1940s, the Mission expanded its work of education and fourteen schools were set up in course and run by the Mission. Two hostels were built during this time in Gudripodi, one for boys and one for girls. Sunday Schools were a part of the Mission education programme and they were held in the Church, in school or wherever a suitable place for a class was available. Gudripodi School was the only Middle English school at that time and produced many 7<sup>th</sup> class pass Christians. Christian Kui villages had more educated persons including the first educated women in the hills.

Teaching in the mother tongue was a basic difference in Mission schools from the Government schools which used Oriya. It was this policy that created interest among the Kui children in coming to school. The mission could keep a close supervision of its schools and staff, and monitored class attendance more effectively than the government schools did. In addition, enrolment drives were undertaken by missionaries and new Kui teachers. Jagannath Naik, an enthusiastic teacher and Sybil Stapples, the missionary, personally visited villages and encouraged parents to send their children to school, offering hostel facilities to children from distant areas. All Kui teachers were from the local community so they were regular in attendance and teaching. U N Patnaik, an administrative officer distinguished the Mission school from the government run ones:

The Baptist Mission has an M E School at Gudripodi near G Udaygiri and it is one of the very few schools that is running on proper line...Two good teachers...Simhadri Panigrahi (teacher at) Gutingia...is very popular, honest and sincere and is respected by Kondhs and non-Kondhs. The next teacher of outstanding merit is Sri Jaganath Nayak, a convert Christian of G.Udaygiri.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Patnaik, U N. "Observations of an Administrative Officer..." p. 11.

A school would be set up in a village when that village and the Mission agreed to start a school. Mission education was open to everyone irrespective of religion, caste or status. Teacher's training received priority in order to raise up teachers from among the Kui. Mission schools also produced educated leaders for the church and voluntary Christian workers.

From 1939, when the Moorshead Mission Hospital was opened in Gudripodi, attention and energy was shifted more to the hospital, while work with schools became secondary. By now the mission, which was running over a dozen schools, could not guarantee the kind of supervision that used to be provided earlier. So it was decided to hand over the schools in distant areas to the government; only the four older schools around the Mission centre remained under Mission control. Missionary Sybil Stapples, who was part of that decision, justified the action saying,

...schools in the more distant villages had not been too successful. The attendance of teachers and children was poor and supervision really difficult. It had seemed right and a leading of God in the late 1940s to concentrate on the upgrading of the 4 schools that could be run by trustworthy Christian teachers in conjunction with Government Inspectors. As a result there are now good Christian Teachers, men and women, in many Government schools through out the area."<sup>45</sup>

By now the Mission had produced a sizable number of Christian teachers who staffed all its schools, and many joined government schools spread over distant parts of the hills. These teachers also gave their services to the church in evangelism and leadership. So emphasis shifted from the establishing or running schools to educating Christian teachers who could join government schools and bring Christian influence to bear in their area of work.

#### D. The Role of Education in Christian Communication

Christian or mission education played a vital and often a foundational and preparatory role in Christianisation. Christian teachers understood education as incorporating Christ's role as the Teacher of true knowledge. The schools effectively prepared the ground and paved the way for Christianity for many of its pupils. The reading of the Bible was made possible by learning to read in school and the Christian routines and rituals learned both in schools and in the hostels inculcated Christian morals and practices. The Mission's emphasis on the use of the mother-tongue not only helped in attracting interest and therefore boosted literacy

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<sup>45</sup> Stapples-Gadd, Sybil. Personal Interview through correspondence, p. 5.

development but also helped readers to understand with ease and in depth what they read. I have reiterated above that education has always been part of the mission of the church and it remained integral to the work of mission in India. Education, like any other Christian communication enterprise, was carried out with missionary zeal and spirit. Besides developing literacy, mission education was aimed at moral growth and character building and emphasised rational learning, science and facts.

Some former students/teachers and other participants in Mission education testified to the part Mission education played in their own conversion and in that of others.

## 1. Vernacular Education as the Key to Mission

The vernacular education of Mission schools distinguished them from the government schools in the hills, and was a first step to success in education. While government schools for many years failed to attract tribal students, the Mission schools were popular from the beginning and received many Kui students, including some girls. Through the schools, the Kui came into close contact and influence of the mission work and became familiar with Christian practices and message.

It was vernacular education that held the key to the breakthrough in Kui attitudes and interest in schools. The missionaries had an advantage due to their knowledge of the language and, ironically, to a greater degree of familiarity with the local culture and ethos than the neighbour or migrant Oriyas, who in business, offices or as school teachers spoke little Kui and expected the Kui to learn Oriya. Missionaries, on the other hand not only spoke Kui but also wrote and provided books of Kui grammar and vocabulary, and produced Kui text books. One significant development was the training of local Kui men and women to become teachers. They included many Christians who brought Christian knowledge and influence to the schools where they worked. Many of them worked in government schools and through them Christian influence was extended to these schools in villages further away from the Mission centre and scattered in the hills.

The Kui Christians recognise the value of the school education started by the Mission: they know that a student of Millman was the first convert of the Kui community. A senior Kui leader and son of a teacher, who was next to be baptised after the first convert family, reminded me that the converts were all students of the first mission school and that they could read the Bible.



Rev Millman set up the school in this village. He was an educationist and if he had stayed longer, we would have far advanced in education. He was first to start Kui medium schools. Here in Udaygiri, the school was Oriya and for a very brief period Telugu was experimented in some government schools. Millman first time started Kui schools. Under a Jackfruit tree he started the first school and the children learned to write on the dust. It is through schools the Christian message bore fruit. Bisi and his family, who were the first converts of the Kondh hills, are from this village and Bisi was a student in this school. He was also the *Kutagatanju*, the Kondh priest. After reading a piece of tract called *Mukti Marga (The Way of Salvation)* and some Gospel books, given to him by John Biswas, and after having regular meetings with John Abba, he wanted to become a Christian. He also convinced his family to become Christian and they were all baptised together, four of them. My father Poto was baptised next. Bisi family in April and my father in June, 1914. My father also was a student in the Mallikapodi school. Bisi studied up to 4<sup>th</sup> class and my father up to 5<sup>th</sup> class. Both were sent for teacher training to Bhanjanagar by Millman. In those days it was Russelkonda. And both became teachers in this school.<sup>46</sup>

Mission vernacular schools, by developing literacy among the Kui, and by using gospel books translated into Kui as the reading material, saw the breakthrough to both education and conversion. Attendance was not a problem. Both children and adults started to learn, Adult Education being part of the Mission education programme. Mission schools set the pace for literacy among the tribal population and school education began to be more or less an accepted part of learning and education of Kui society. Laird, who studied missionary education work in Bengal, singled out 'vernacular elementary education' as the major missionary contribution in the education of the ordinary masses and notably girls and women.<sup>47</sup>

However, as Oriya remained the medium of higher education and as more and more Kui passing out from Primary and Middle school were going on to High school or teacher training schools, there was much pressure to bring Oriya into Primary schools. The educated Kui considered it more dignified to speak Oriya, the sign of higher education. The government schools always taught in Oriya in all its schools in the hills as it never had a plan of developing the Kui language, Kui text books or teachers in that language.

## 2. Literacy Enabled the Reading of the Bible and Reflection

Literacy and the reading of the Bible went hand in hand. The first thing literacy achieved was to enable people to read the Christian scriptures and literature. As the Bible was translated, and books were produced and distributed, literacy was

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<sup>46</sup> Interview # 42.

<sup>47</sup> Laird, M A. *Missionaries and Education 1793-1837*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, pp. 263-274.

necessary for its reading. At the same time as people began to read they had the Christian Gospel as reading material. School children learned Bible stories and songs from an early age, and read other Christian books at school, absorbing Christian ideas and thoughts. Some adults joined the Adult Literacy classes and so they also could read and reflect on the Christian stories they read. Though literacy rates were always low those who could read did so for others also. This has been a pattern among other societies as well when literacy is not a mass skill.

In the following interview narrative, a retired Mission school teacher and headmaster describes how the school was the source from where he himself learned about Christianity and also brought this knowledge to his parents.

I studied in the Kanbagiri School and then in Gudripodi School. I have studied up to 8<sup>th</sup> standard. In the M E school I attended Sunday School regularly. We liked Sunday School and I used to sit for Sunday School exams. I got a Bible as prize for good result. I taught my father from the Bible and told him about Christianity. We used to worship Bura Penu. Our Kui religion had so many parallels to Old Testament religion--Human sacrifice, animal sacrifice and making booths in the field etc. *How did you become a Christian?* While studying in school and through the Sunday school. From the beginning I was interested in study. I also attended Sunday school regularly. I wanted to study further and complete high school but the Mission did not have facility for higher education. Missionaries did not encourage us for higher education. See the Roman Catholics, how much they are developing education. But our Mission was satisfied with Primary schools. In those days it was easy to get a school teacher's job even with primary education. The teachers also were very much involved in preaching. They could read the Bible and teach so they were given opportunity to preach in the Church. I have preached in many places of our area. Bisi Abba, our first convert, was also a preacher. He established our Kanbagiri Church. Like him and similarly other teachers also helped in Church work a great deal.<sup>48</sup>

Bible reading was encouraged in the schools and more particularly in the Sunday school classes. New Testaments in Kui were given as prizes, the only book of any status in the Kui language. Bible reading at home brought the message of the Bible direct to families, and elders made comparisons and contrasts of its stories with their own stories and traditional beliefs. Striking comparisons between the Hebrew religion of the Old Testament and tribal religions are often made by converts from the tribal communities in India. Timotheas Hembrom's doctoral thesis compared

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<sup>48</sup> Interview # 10.

Santal Creation tradition with the Biblical account of Genesis.<sup>49</sup> “These cosmogony traditions of the Saoras, Mundas and similar groups have striking similarity in salient points to the records of the first eight chapters of the Bible.” says Sunder Raj.<sup>50</sup> Macpherson compared the Kondh Bura Penu with the God of Light of the Bible.<sup>51</sup> The Kui Bible and the literate school children of the family brought the Christian message to the Kui homes directly. The evangelism process at work through them was quite effective in many cases. So in many families, children became Christian first and then influenced their parents to become Christian.

The Christian message was communicated in schools as well—reading and writing exercises were based on simple stories and texts. The Bible and Christian books were the first reading material for the newly literate. In their eagerness to read, they read what was available and this was the Christian Gospel and Christian books.

In addition to this, the Bible text and its message had another function. To the reader and listener alike, the Bible message was also a source of counsel, advice, assurance and guidance. The Christian pastors and leaders quoted the Bible texts as authentic and authoritative answers to questions concerning death for example, and to problems of behaviour such as drinking and they used the Bible to support most of the claims they made in preaching or personal evangelism, which has been discussed in the previous chapter. Christian standards, claims and promises were drawn from the written biblical text, which now was recognised by the Kui as a new source of legitimacy and authority.

### 3. Education Moved the Boundary and ‘Broadened the Horizon’

“Now we know, why should we do any Puja (sacrifice)?”

This assertive question of a convert in my interview summarises the effect of knowing beyond the traditional understanding about things around and beyond. This was said in the context of abandoning the regular and mandatory sacrifices after conversion. ‘The Pastor told us’, ‘the Bible says’ or ‘now we know’ (this last is also peer knowledge, learned from those who can read and write or are teachers, for

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<sup>49</sup> Chapter four of his book is entitled ‘Comparison of the Santal Creation Tradition with the Biblical Creation Tradition.’ See Hembrom, T. *The Santals: Anthropological-Theological Reflections On Santali and Biblical Traditions*. Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1996, pp. 224-140.

<sup>50</sup> Sunder Raj, E. *The Confusion Called Conversion*. New Delhi: TRACI Publications, 1998, p. 100. Quoting from Vidyarthi and Rai, he says, “The Munda myth explains it was Sing Bonga who brooded over water and the first beings were born.”

<sup>51</sup> Padel, F. *Sacrifice of Human Being*, p. 81.

example) are phrases which express the new source of authority and knowledge which has entered their world and has now changed them. Yet this conversion did not follow Robin Horton's theory of conversion, which is that 'traditional religions' convert from microcosm to macrocosm, or that the traditional religions microcosmic world gives way to the macrocosmic world religion in conversion: his view assumes a previously closed world.<sup>52</sup> The Kondh religion, existing so close to and for so long with Hindu religion had already bridged some ethnic and territorial boundaries, negotiated other meaning systems. Hinduisation of tribals and tribal influence on the main Hindu cult has taken place over the centuries through adaptation and accommodation on both sides.<sup>53</sup>

Education, however, expanded the horizon of the Kui world view giving a non-Hindu authority. Western modern education emphasised science and objective thinking and learning. The emphasis of education was on knowing facts and on rational thinking. This learning challenged and undermined Kui traditional beliefs so that the world of nature, in which particular trees, some stones or streams, for example, were regarded as powerful objects, began to lose its significance in the minds of the 'knowledgeable'. Now there was less fear of clearing the jungle to claim land which previously had been regarded as under the control of spirits and would have been done with concern and care for the concerned spirit. Now for sickness, hospital medicine was preferred: bypassing the spirits and the sacrifices was possible. However, with conversion, not all traditional beliefs and ritual practices have disappeared altogether or been abandoned totally. They were suppressed and bypassed when necessary or co-existed with modern and Christian beliefs and practices as convenient. But at the same time the alternative knowledge which was offered through Christianity was rapidly appropriated in conversion.

#### 4. The Mission Hostels Formed a Christian Pattern of Life

The Gudripodi Mission Hostels, one for boys and one for girls in the same compound, provided boarding for children of distant villages, and thus facilitated their education. The hostels were also used by some students in higher education who were enabled to attend the government Hubback High School in Udaygiri.

<sup>52</sup> Horton, Robin. *Modes of Thought: Essays on Thinking in Western and non-Western Societies*. London: Faber, 1973. Also see his "African Conversion" in *Africa*. Vol. 41, (1971) 85-108.

<sup>53</sup> See Panda, Sisir K, "Evolution of Jagannatha Cult" In Mishra P K (Ed). *Comprehensive History and Culture of Orissa. Vol I*. New Delhi: Kaveri Books, 1997 and Eschmann, A, Kulke H, and Tripathy, G C (Ed). *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*. New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1978.

Initially many hostel children were from non-Christian families but later with the increase of Christian conversion hostel children were increasingly from Christian families.

A typical day in the hostels involved rising early in the morning, washing, bathing and having breakfast. Schools ran from 8.00 to 1.00, followed by a mid-day meal, a period of play and homework until 4.30; then all gathered in the large room for a period of hymn singing, Bible reading, prayer and Bible teaching. Evenings were occupied with mealtime and leisure. On Saturdays, girls accompanied the house mother to the weekly market for personal and hostel shopping and did their weekly laundry. On Sundays, Church and Sunday school were compulsory. On average 45 girls and 30 boys lived in the hostels in any given year. Among the children who lived in these hostels were many who became nurses, teachers, preachers, at least two doctors, and other professionals who have entered government or private service and Church ministry. A third hostel was opened later in the 1950s in Baliguda in the south of Kondh hills.

The hostel life routinised a Christian pattern of life and practice. Personal habits of cleanliness, hygiene, time-keeping and Christian disciplines of prayer and reading of Bible were practised and children lived in close Christian relationship. Life in the hostel formed in the line of proper Christian living.

I was a boarder in Gudripodi boys hostel and there I became a Christian. I was a non-Christian among the many Christian students. In the beginning I did not like hostel life. I did not like to live there. So I had no friends and I reacted to things happening in the hostel. But the hostel warden was patient with me. Others there tried to make me understand things. And it so happened that I wanted to become a Christian. This is strange but this is what happened. I would say that in the hostel I came to like Christianity and wanted to become a Christian. My family did not like me talking about it but I became a Christian. And it also happened that I became an evangelist and a full-time Christian minister. I have worked with many missionaries. I have worked with the Bible translation committee. I have gone with missionaries to preach. Later I have led preaching teams. Going and living in a village, teaching the village people to keep their streets clean, how to make washing powder from burning banana trunks and making ashes and so on. In one village I took the broom myself and started sweeping the street then they came and did themselves...<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Interview # 32.



The person interviewed testified that his conversion took place in the hostel and he recognised its Christian routine and influence. Like the schools the hostels played a crucial role. They were useful auxiliaries to the school education. Children were exposed to Christian living—which the seniors were expected to model as well as Christian teaching. So preaching and practice, and teaching and imitation of values and morals went on routinely during the hostel life. Children from a young age were moulded into a particular life style and discipline different from that of their Kui heritage. This experience was vastly different from what they had known before; they were regimented, organised, disciplined as groups, and given routine moral and religious teaching. Hostel students learned about basic hygiene and health. Rules of washing, bathing, brushing, cutting of hair and nails and such matters of cleanliness and hygiene were regularly taught and practised. Moreover, these rules were regarded as essential to Christian living. Because those who led and supervised the hostel life were Christians, hostel advice and teaching were often combined with biblical advice. It was a different world from the villages where the children had lived.

These students returned home with new ideas, stories and a changed life style and had an influence on their siblings and their parents. Children brought home Bibles, Christian songs, clean dressing styles and personal habits as well as many new ideas, concepts and Christian learning. For Christian and non-Christian children alike, hostel life was a place for regular practice of Christian duties and rituals. Bible reading, prayer, hymn singing and church worship were part of the daily routine. It was in these hostels that many future Christian leaders were formed. Thus, the hostels undoubtedly were an important part of the educational mission, playing a vital role in the goal of Christian education and communication.

## 5. Vital Role of the Sunday Schools

Sunday School classes were a favourite with the children. The story telling, singing, prayer, memorising Bible verses and teaching through visual aids like the Magic Lantern and pictures in flannel graphs engaged children in ways which held their interest in these classes. Sunday Schools were conducted in some school rooms as well as in the churches. Some school teachers were involved in conducting the Sunday School classes, which combined the Church and the school system; and Bible lessons and Christian songs learned regularly in the Sunday School familiarised young children with Christian vocabulary. The year-end exams/tests

were carried out with regularity. A senior church leader testified that it was through Sunday School education that he came to know about Christianity and decided to become a Christian.

I was attending Sunday School in our Mallikapori village where I learned about Christianity. Millman started this school in 1909 and this is the first school of the village. Next a school was established in Kanbagiri, then in Grasingia about four kilometres from here, then Botangia, Kanjamendi, Pidamaha and Rudangia, then others. In the Sunday school we came to know Christ and became Christians. Rev Evans baptised us, me and my two brothers all were baptised together. We brothers taught our parents about the Bible and the Gospel. My parents were baptised later. 1947 is my year of baptism. After high school I went to study in college and went to Agra to do BSc in Agriculture. I joined in the government service and served for five years. Then I resigned my government job and joined in the ministry. I did a theological training in Serampore, an LTh course of three years. I was involved with the Mission's Adult Literacy programme for more than five years but I am basically an evangelist.<sup>55</sup>

So these Sunday Schools were another avenue through which Christian teaching was effectively channelled to young minds. For this convert and Christian leader and others, it was the Sunday School which was his source of Christian knowledge and his conversion. Much more than the schools, Sunday School classes provided direct and innovative ways of communicating Christian teaching to young potential converts. In a sense, the concept and institution of a Sunday religious school or class was unique: its impact on young learners who enjoyed being there because of a happy time of singing and story-telling was clear. Besides being entertaining, the classes offered space for thinking about faith and reflecting on moral and life issues—something quite new to children from the hill villages.

Here again, the children brought a Christian influence to bear on their parents, who found it easier to trust their own children and be influenced by them in matters new and alien to the beliefs held by them. Literate children read and learned about subjects and similarly about Christian religious and moral teachings which the parents did not know. Here conversion of the parents was effected by the children who knew the written Bible before their parents. This was one of those unusual situations in the field of religious conversion; normally, converted parents teach their children their new faith. So the Sunday School, school and hostel children played a vital part in mediating the mission's gospel message to parents and elders.

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<sup>55</sup> Interview # 40.

## 6. School Teachers as Agents of Christianisation

The Christian school teachers combined the role of an evangelist-pastor-teacher. Many trained by the mission became very useful and valuable assets to the mission and church work as they engaged in active evangelism. Many teachers who joined the government schools in distant villages were the only Christians in an area and became the first evangelists. School teachers also provided much needed leadership in conducting church worship where there were no pastors. For many school children in the hills, the Christian teachers were the source of their first knowledge of Christianity. The following two cases are testimony to the Christian teachers' role in evangelism and conversion.

I have completed high school education and I am a matriculate. I went to Gudripodi hostel and did my high school study in the government Hubback High School. Then worked as a teacher for five years. But I had to leave the teacher's job to help my father in cultivation. We have about 100 acres of land and I am the only son of my parents. When I was studying in our Tumudibandha primary school I became a Christian. Our headmaster was Christian. Some others and I used to go to him for tuition in the evenings and he used to read to us from the Bible. He used to sing and taught us songs. I also got to read his Bible. When my brother suddenly died he consoled me and taught me from the Bible that if a Christian dies he will rise again because Christ has risen from the dead. When I finished 5<sup>th</sup> class in 1952 I was baptised and became a Christian. I went to Gudripodi hostel for high school study. After the CNI was formed I attended the lay leaders' class and Bishop Jugal Mohany has ordained me. I work voluntarily in our Church and preach also.<sup>56</sup>

Our village schoolteacher was a Christian and we knew they are Saheb's men. So I later asked him about this (about the sermon preached by Mr Evans). Then he told me the meaning and also gave me a New Testament. That teacher made me a Christian later. He is the first Christian to come here. I visited him often. He was always interested to explain to me from the Bible.<sup>57</sup>

As is clear from the two responses above, these school teachers played an active and vital role in introducing the Christian message to children and in assisting those who came seeking help to understand the Bible's teaching. Christian school teachers played the role of teacher-evangelists or teacher-pastors. They helped in the church in conducting Sunday services and in giving leadership, and taught in schools, where they also did some evangelism. As school teachers enjoying a

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<sup>56</sup> Interview # 26.

<sup>57</sup> Interview # 7.

position of prestige and authority as ‘village school master’, they used their influence in the service of the gospel or in personal evangelism. Often teachers were consulted by village people on a range of matters relating to politics, village disputes, police cases or business. So they enjoyed the privilege of being consulted or approached for information or taken into people’s confidence. This privilege could be put to use by them to witness to their own faith or in assisting and guiding others to know about the Christian faith. Some teachers were known to interfere unhelpfully in village politics and gained a bad reputation for this. Yet many Christian teachers had a tremendously positive influence in the place of their work and among the village people where they served.

## 7. The Emerging New Educated Professional Class

Education resulted in the emergence of a new professional class among the educated who found white and blue collar jobs in the government and became regarded as the new elite. The Pan Christians who were among the early converts (before the 1950s) and lived closer to the mission geographically became better educated than the Kondhs. Increasing number of Pans not only converted to Christianity but also took full advantage of the mission and government education: a majority of the Christian school teachers were Pans. The Mission hospital also trained many nurses and medical technicians, a large number of whom were Pans. Traditionally regarded as inferior, the Pan community became visibly more prosperous and acquired new status and respectability with an emerging professional class among them. This sent a clear message to the Kondhs, the masters of the hills, that it was school education and its fruit of job opportunity which was placing the Pans above the Kondhs economically and socially. Ironically the more numerous and superior minded Kondhs, less literate and excluded from the new professional class of the hills, now did not hesitate to aspire to become like the rising Pans whom they had always considered inferior. This was one of the important factors that motivated the Kondhs to turn to Christianity from the mid-1950s.

## 8. Mission Education Brought Christian Social Ideals

Mission school education taught and practiced Christian social ideals. Along with the emphasis on Christian rationality, science and facts, Christian social ideals of equality and the equal dignity was emphasised in education. Girls and women joined school and many received training as teacher and nurse. Pan and Kondh,

Oriya and Pan, and Christian and non-Christian were given equal opportunity and education without discrimination. Social equality and dignity taught and practiced in the mission were radical ideas in a culture milieu where untouchability and social distance existed in different degrees between the Pan, Kondh and Oriya. Missionaries took the side of the socially despised, vulnerable and weak. Missionaries and Christian teachers admitted students from all sections, mingled freely with them and gave equal opportunity of education and learning without any regard for caste or status. The Pans, lowest in status, were not only given education but also trained as teachers and taught alongside Oriya high caste teachers. Similarly, in jobs offered by the Mission, whether as teachers or as hospital staff—nurse, compounder, clerk or lab technician—equal opportunity and position was given according to their education and training. This transformed social relationships and social identity. The Christian ideas of equality and dignity of all people were particularly attractive to the Pan community who had a subservient role in the eyes of the Kondhs. Education and its economic and social benefits made much more difference to how they were regarded by others. The church community has thus reduced much of the traditional barriers between Pans and Kondhs: as Christians they sit, worship and eat together, though some inner barriers still persist.

## 9. Education the Road for Christianity into Kui Society

Education enabled reading of books, which was not only a novelty and new activity in a spoken only culture but the literature they began to read profoundly affected their thinking. Education was *preparatio evangelica* for the Christian gospel. The Christian message was substantially mediated through the Christian texts, particularly the Bible, literacy paved the way for Christianisation as books or literature brought the Christian message. The new literates, often school boys and girls, influenced their parents and siblings and other village folk were influenced. Many Pan and Kondh school and hostel children carried their new habits, ideas and some of their new faith and conviction to their distant homes which had never heard the Christian message before. Both hostel and school students carried Bibles, Christian literature and the Christian songs and prayers they had learned to their parents and friends in the villages. Bible and Christian books were the main or only reading material available.

Christian teachers who went and joined government schools in different parts of the hills villages brought the new Christian ideas, stories and religious practices to



these distant villages. Together with education printed books and the Bible in the Kui language the Christian message reached Kui society. Thus education not only produced literates but also brought Christian knowledge. Even government school students learned about Christianity through Christian texts and Christian teachers.

## 10. Teaching Ambience: Discipline vs. Punishment

There was a perceived difference between the distance controlled Oriya-dominated government school system with absentee teachers, and the closely supervised Kui-dominated and religiously conscious mission schools which made the latter popular among the Kui. One specific problem was ill-tempered government school teachers who controlled children with terror tricks and with physical and mental punishment, leading to the weak, slow or less motivated learners leaving school half way through. These individuals ruled and controlled without care and sensitivity towards students but their behaviour was never censured. School punishment of any kind, as long as it did not disable the child physically, was an accepted part of the education process, and what would now be regarded as abusive punishment was both ordinary and not confined to schools in the hills. The fact that the majority of teachers were Oriya outsiders who lorded it over both Pans and Kondhs—and also the eagerness of the Pans to assume a position of authority over the Kondhs, to whom they were traditionally subservient—led to some harsh treatment of Kondh and Pan children depending on which group the teacher belonged to. It is highly significant that two converts who were school drop-outs pointed out clearly that cruelty of teachers was the reason for their dropping out from school.

*Have you been to school and up to which class you studied?* I was studying in school but I did not finish, left school halfway. *Why?* I left because the teacher used to beat. *Was it a lot of beating?* Yes, Yes, those days they used to beat a lot. I was very very scared of going to school. Now a days you are paying so much money to study. But we did not study when it was free. I was scared of study. *Study or teacher?* Both. That's why we are like pigs today. *How did you become a Christian?* My son died. In spite of all the expenses, about 1000, 2000 I spent...*In medicine?* No, on puja and all that. But nothing happened. So I was disgusted. My son is dead, why should I hold on to that Satan. I went away to...and made money there. And came home with money. Then I became a Christian.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Interview # 39.

The value of school education is clearly internalised here and regarded as something that makes a Kui a full human; those without it are just 'like pigs'. There is a tone of regret for not continuing study, and a harsh teacher is given as the deterrent factor. The blame for dropping out is put on the individual teacher who influenced the new learners negatively with punishment instead of motivating them. A fear of the teacher, and so of the school, demonstrates the specific problem. As a convert, he described his conversion in Christian terms, not holding on 'to that Satan'. Similarly another person mentioned made it clear that it was the teacher who stood in the way of his education.

I left school because the teacher was a terror. He used to beat the children severely for small mistakes. He would pinch my stomach and hit with a cane on my fingers. I could not continue to study in school because of that teacher.<sup>59</sup>

The description gives more detail about the punishment and shows its severity. Teachers often prided themselves on creating fear and demanding respect from the pupils, and students were expected to accept everything from the guru. Behera says that the Kui parents' "aggressive refusal to send their children to schools forced the Government to deploy police force to collect students for schools."<sup>60</sup> The Oriya outside teachers in government employment, in general, seemed to lack any interest in the educational development of the tribal Kondh.

In the Mission's approach, care was taken to create interest in schools and develop literacy using Kui teachers. Separate Adult Education programmes and even night classes were conducted in literacy among adults. Christian charity, gift giving and reward to promising children were practiced. Under closer supervision by missionaries and trained Kui teachers, mission schools created an ambience that was attractive to the Kui. Besides the skills of reading/writing, focus was also on morals and character in Mission education. Behera observed that in the Mission schools, "The educated Khonds appeared more exposed to the Christian Missionary influences and the Western values."<sup>61</sup> This in effect introduced discipline, cleanliness, code of dress, avoidance of alcohol, and so on; it was expected that teachers be Christian examples to their students of the morals and values they taught.

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<sup>59</sup> Interview # 31.

<sup>60</sup> Behera, D. *The Bhanjas and the Khonds of Orissa*. Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1987, p. 162.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

## Conclusion

Education has played a key role in social as well as religious change in the hills. The Mission's emphasis on vernacular and elementary education attracted Kui people to school. Mission education was ideologically Christian education and made a Christian impact on its students. Literacy prepared and equipped the Kui to encounter the Christian message in the printed pages of the Bible. Schools were a useful auxiliary to the Mission and the Church in the hills.

Education developed literacy and learning science and facts broadened the horizon of the newly literate. Western education and emphasis on science and facts challenged and weakened the traditional ideas and beliefs. Kui traditional and religious boundaries also breached or began to break with outside ideas and western school education.

A new class of professionals emerged among the Pans through education. Their visible prosperity and sophisticated style of living could not be ignored by the Kondhs and also became a challenge to the majority and superior minded Kondhs. This was one of the educational factors for Kondh attraction to Christianity. The Christian school teachers, too, proved an effective agent of Christianisation as they performed the role of teacher-evangelists and teacher-pastors. Schools also gave the church its educated and able leaders.

A fundamental contribution of mission education was its social teachings of the equality and dignity of all humans irrespective of gender, caste or social identity. Education, with its Christian character thus gave a new identity and sense of dignity to both the Pan and the Kondh, as both had low status in the eyes of plains peoples. Education as the main agent of Christianisation was limited. Literacy remained low, and in terms of conversion the majority of mission school pupils did not convert to Christianity.

## Chapter Six

### Mission to the Sick: Message of Healing As Change Agent

*“Send us a doctor and we will make him a god.”* Macpherson<sup>1</sup>

*“Now we go to the hospital. Getting well and loving the Lord.”* Convert

#### Introduction

Parallel to education, the mission to the sick became a substantial part of the mission work. The Moorshead Memorial Mission Hospital ‘was the only hospital capable of major surgery’, provided quality nursing care, cheaper medicine and also effective primary health care. The ready presence and professional treatment of a dedicated hospital staff saved many lives and eliminated much of the suffering. The hospital played a distinct Christian role in service to the sick and became a symbol of confidence and hope in people’s distress in sickness. Irene Wright, a long serving staff, claimed that the people “recognised that the motivation for caring came from ‘The Great God – the hospital was often called the ‘Place where God lives’.”<sup>2</sup> The sprawling hospital complex, western medicines, surgery and care ‘delivered’ a strong message of the efficacy of Christian healing; the institution, the content and the service all communicating powerfully. The gospel’s credibility in people’s minds was linked to effective medicine and to the personalised treatment and care of the medical mission. The Christian humanitarian engagement with the sick, the suffering and the dying was a message in itself and a powerful one.

In the past few decades, the concept of 'development communication' and its role in social change have been the subject of social and communication theories.<sup>3</sup> However, Christian mission institutions involved in literacy development, grass-roots communication, primary health care and many more pioneering areas of social and

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<sup>1</sup> Macpherson, William. *Memorials of Service in India*, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> Irene Write joined the hospital in February 1948 and retired as its Nursing Superintendent in August 1972. Quoted from the short resume of her work sent to me through correspondence. p.1.

<sup>3</sup> The studies on development and communication in the Third World context began to be popular through the works of the East-West Centre, Honolulu. See Lerner Daniel. *Communication and Change in Developing Countries*. Honolulu: East-West Centre, 1967. Also see Narula, Uma and Pearce, B. *Development as Communication: A Perspective on India*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986 and Mody, Bella. *Designing Messages for Development Communication: An Audience Participation Based Approach*. New Delhi: Sage, 1991.

community work have long experienced change through such ‘development communication’.

Traditional medicine was woefully inadequate, particularly in epidemics such as cholera, smallpox and tuberculosis, which are known to have come from the plains. The traditional approach to healing was through rituals and sacrifices and most illnesses were commonly believed to be caused by some spirits, misfortune or the supernatural. Macpherson had believed that a doctor’s service would be seen as a miracle and save many lives. Western medicine’s obvious superiority over tribal medicine posed a challenge to the traditional practices, resulting in loss of faith in the tribal medicine and rituals associated with it. Tribal medicine and healing methods began to appear ineffective to their practitioners. The Mission Hospital was opened only in 1939, even then this quaint claim of Macpherson cited above a century ago has come true in the testimony of the converts for whom the mission doctor and hospital medicine have been godsend and life saving. Healing and religion were related in the traditional Kui world view and brought to a new height in the Mission health-care practice which consciously promoted the relationship. To the Mission as well as to the Kui, healing was spiritual as well as physical.

In this chapter I examine the role of the medical mission and what message it sent to the people in their endemic sickness and suffering; and how the gospel became credible and acceptable to the sick in this mission. What role did the hospital play as a major and important auxiliary of mission and as a key instrument in bringing modern medicine and ‘Christian’ health practices to the Kui people?

## A. The Healing Practices: Traditional Kui and the Medical Mission

Throughout the world, and from time immemorial, medicine has been linked with religion. It could scarcely be otherwise when both are concerned with matters of life and death. In many places the physician was also priest...<sup>4</sup>

### 1. The Kondh Priest-doctor and the Healing Rituals

The Kondh tribal priest, who is also the community doctor, is *Kutagatanju* or *Kuta gatari*, the divine man or woman. Females in the job are few but have equal power with the men. They are expected to observe strict discipline in specified matters, have some knowledge of herbal or natural medicines, perform rituals and

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<sup>4</sup> Davey, Dr Frank. *Heralds of Health: The Saga of Christian Medical Initiatives*. London: Christian Medical Fellowship, 1985, p. 1.



sacrifices and their office is sacred. Earlier the *Jaani* was the great priest, who alone could perform the Meria rites, and the lower priest was the *Kutagatanju* and *Kutagatari*. But now in some places the latter is also called *Jaani*. They should not eat food from their clients but only accept, and may demand, liquor from them. They may observe some fast before any important ritual and should abstain from sexual intercourse at the same time.

However, importantly, the priest-doctor was an integral part of the community who knew all in the community personally. So the priest always knew the patient, even the relatives of the sick around the village and their worries and anxieties. To a great degree the priest enjoyed the trust and respect and had influence, but if he misused the privilege then he/she was in the risk of being rejected and replaced by another priest.

The ways of diagnosis and treatment of sicknesses involved seeking the help of the unseen spirits concerned. The priest was called and he went into a trance to find out the cause. Another way of diagnosis was through balancing a sickle by a thread with rice placed on its blade. He/she would call out the name of the spirits and watch for the blade to swing. If it did, that spirit was the cause and needed to be propitiated. If not then he passed over to other names. Some sicknesses could be 'sent' by humans through the help of spirits as revenge or for settling scores; or an evil eye could cause damage to physical health or aggravate a wound already being suffered. But generally sicknesses were believed to be caused by the spirits and due to a break down in relationships between humans and the spirit world.

Proper study of the Kondh medicines is still an unresearched area, and modern medical doctors, including the missionaries, were not just sceptical about tribal medicine but rejected them as superstition. Drs Wilkins and Thomas's memoirs of medical service in the Kondh hills did not mention any Kondh medicines. Boal, who wrote a number of papers on Kondh tribal medicine, focused primarily on the ritual aspects.<sup>5</sup> However, medicines made from herbs, roots, bark, fruits, seeds and parts of animal bodies form tribal medicines which are administered with or without rituals. The bitter Neem leaf and turmeric for the skin and similarly castor oil as an ointment are commonly used. Liquor from rice and Mohua (*Bassia Latifolia*) are used for pleasure and also as medicine. The animal meat shared from sacrificial

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<sup>5</sup> Boal, Barbara. *Folk Medicine: Religion and Health Care Among the Konds To-day*. (Seventh European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies). London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1981. Also by her "The Kond Hill-People's Traditional Approach to Medicine" Unpublished seminar paper.

offerings form part of the treatment, to overcome sadness through food and celebration. Painful branding with a hot iron for stomach or spleen problems, particularly for children, is another form of treatment.

The priest was often accompanied by one or more Pan assistants who played the music, a pipe instrument or drum, as part of healing ritual. One bearer carried the necessary materials for the ritual. The mark of a priest on his way to work consisted a bamboo clapper in one hand and a black hen on the other. The priests recited spoken ritual prayers in archaic Kui from memory, while a few words might also be spontaneous. Some details of the invocations and procedures varied from place to place. The priest-doctor was actually a divine agent and performed the necessary sacrifices to restore the relationship between the seen and the unseen which was vital to health and healing. From Kogera Pradhan's handwritten note book and from her own research Boal wrote that the Kui rituals were obligatory actions for the restoration and maintenance of relationship between the Kui, the land and the cosmic world.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Challenge to Traditional Practice

The number of cases of sickness was high and made a great demand on the priest's service, who normally remained busy visiting the houses of the sick. It brought the priest some income in terms of the sacrificial chicken or other animals but the people also expected healing against the payment. For failures in healing, the priest often blamed the spirits saying he/she was not in touch with the spirits which had visited from outside the priest's jurisdiction. Or sometimes a number of such spirits might join forces and their strength became greater than the priest could handle. On the other hand to counteract any suspected cheating or trickery by the priest, the people had a system in place which spelled no payment if no healing. Most sicknesses were attributed to the power of the spirits and therefore healing was primarily expected to come by propitiation through sacrifices. So when Meria sacrifices were suppressed by the British the people feared its consequences on their physical health. Macpherson wrote that the Kondhs had asked him for medical doctors in place of their priest doctors when the abolition of Meria sacrifice was imposed on them.

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<sup>6</sup> Boal, Barbara. *Man, the Gods and Search for Cosmic wellbeing*. BBSR: NISWASS, 1999.

...the priest alone can enable us to cure our diseases and those of our wives and children, by informing us, when attacked, which god is offended and what is the expiation. Now, had we a doctor who could cure us with out reference to the gods, as we learn that your doctors cure you, all would be well. If we remain dependent on the priests for cure, they will refer all our diseases to the Earth God unpropitiated by human blood, and we must sacrifice or die.<sup>7</sup>

It was in this context Macpherson had written, 'send us a doctor and we will make him a god'. But no doctor came from the government and finding an Oriya Brahmin who had some knowledge of medicine and was in possession of some medical books, Macpherson appointed him, but he could not continue as he fell sick with malaria and left the place.

The tribals did have their home remedies and herbal medicines, but they remained inadequate. Cases of sickness and mortality remained high and people lacked effective treatment. Compared to modern drugs and treatment, tribal healing rituals increasingly appeared unsatisfactory and lacking results. Tribal medicine increasingly faced challenges from modern medicine and its success in cases often given-up by the priest-doctors. Now Christians boldly say, "we sacrificed endlessly still our children died. Now we go to the Hospital and we get well". While the Kui priest's esoteric knowledge was not questioned and the emphasis on the restoration of relationship with the cosmic world was right, at the same time problems of diseases and sickness related to physical or biological causes remained. Poverty and epidemics or new diseases brought by the outsiders had compounded the problem.

### **3. The Mission Hospital and the Medical Practice**

Missionaries engaged in helping the sick in the Kondh hills from the beginning. The diseases and sufferings and the lack of effective and modern treatment had forced them to attend to the health needs of the people. They gave out simple medicines or helped to take some seriously sick ones to the government hospital down the hills in Russellkonda. Goadby, the first and visiting missionary, confessed that he 'longed for a doctor's equipment and skill' when a mother brought to him her child covered with sores but he could not help. Arthur Long, the other pioneer wrote,

I took a poor little child from Udaygiri to the Russell-konda Hospital this morning. Her bowels were all hanging out. It was a wonder she was alive. This is the fourth person in eight days we have persuaded to go with us to the hospital. They fear the

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<sup>7</sup> Macpherson, William. *Memorials of Service in India*, p. 187.

Government native doctor, but they have confidence in us, and know we sympathise and care.<sup>8</sup>

Other missionaries too described what they experienced about the stark reality of diseases and sickness and peoples' expectation from the missionary in terms of medical help. Freda Laughlin wrote, one day

...when I only knew a little Kui, I went to a village. In a few minutes the whole place was in the street. Sick babies with inflamed eyes, folk with festering wounds, others begging me to go and see a badly burned woman...Never did I so long for medical knowledge."<sup>9</sup>

Wilkinson described the magnitude of the problem and demand on the missionaries,

At Udaygiri, as we go forth each day to our work, a small crowd awaits us, who have come for medicine...And from lack of knowledge, means and time we have to say 'we can do little for you'. Some times only few come; some times 40 or 50... During 1921, 4000 people were helped by us—folks suffering from malaria, black-water fever, venereal disease, ophthalmia, influenza, dysentery, pneumonia, tuberculosis, tetanus, skin diseases of all kinds, burns, scalds, snake-bites and accidents. How long must these poor folk be left to the mercies of amateurs?<sup>10</sup>

A Mission hospital in the hills was conceived due to the reality of peoples' suffering and the experience of the missionaries. Arthur Long prepared the ground for the visit of Dr Moorshead, the secretary of the Baptist Medical Mission Auxiliary in 1909 that kindled the hope of a hospital soon. But the hospital could not be properly started for another thirty years.<sup>11</sup> One main reason was modern hospitals were and are a highly expensive affair. The first doctor to arrive was Dr Hugh Craig of Edinburgh in 1929. He opened his clinic in a class room of the Mission school and admitted patients in four Mission godowns cleared out for the purpose. But in three years he and his nurse wife were struck with serious malaria and had to leave.<sup>12</sup> Some sporadic supply of government medical help to the hills only in winter season did not coincide with occurrences of illness and some immunization attempts did little to prevent diseases. A small government dispensary was opened later in Udaygiri but its services remained unsatisfactory.

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<sup>8</sup> Carey, Pearce. *Dawn on the Kond Hills*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 115.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 90.

<sup>11</sup> The death of Arthur Long in 1909, the outbreak of the First World War, followed by the Great Depression of the 1930s and the death of Dr Moorshead himself in 1934 all kept stalling the plan and progress of efforts to build a hospital in the Kondh hills until 1939.

<sup>12</sup> They had named their Edinburgh home 'Udayagiri'. Carey, *Dawn on the Kond Hills*, p. 118.

Doctor Gordon Wilkins started the building of the hospital and it was opened on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1939 as Moorshead Memorial Mission Hospital. The Hospital was equipped with many modern facilities and different wards were built for children, women and men, and isolation unit. The government dispensary work was taken over by the hospital and the dispensary closed down. A Nursing training programme for both males and females was started soon. Specialist treatments for leprosy and tuberculosis were provided. The Hospital treatment covered almost every area of health need from eye care and dental care to many types of surgery, from orthopaedic to restorative leprosy treatment. The Government not only approved the work done by the Hospital but also provided financial grants for specific needs, and government doctors were deputed to serve from time to time. The Hospital reached a total of 100 bedded facility, the average in-patients were 120 or more at busy times, and a much larger number was treated as out-patients. Its lab and surgical facilities were adequate. The successful surgical operations of Dr Stanley Thomas, one of the long serving missionary doctors, and the satisfactory nursing care of the Hospital, attracted patients from other districts as well. The services were not entirely free, the rich had to pay more to subsidize the treatment of the poor. Still the Hospital work involved large allocations of resources including a substantial grant from the Orissa government. The Hospital, no doubt, was a crucial instrument in transforming the long neglected lives of the hills people.

#### **4. Primary Health Care**

The hospital's primary health and hygiene programme brought the benefits of the knowledge of the vital hygiene and sanitation practices to large numbers of people. It helped people to learn about the causes of sickness and prevent diseases. Hospital staff taught pastors and village leaders, who in turn taught others in their villages, simple hygiene and sanitation practices, preventive health care and first-aid methods. Those who came to the Hospital for treatment, or to attend to their patients, experienced its effective treatment, nursing and personal care. Detailed health teaching programmes with syllabus outlines were drawn up and taught in the Hospital and also taken into the villages. Preventive health care was given priority. A manual or Syllabus of Health Teaching included some twenty areas of focus for health teaching:<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Health Teaching". Typed Syllabus, unpublished document in missionary file of Joyce Henry.



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|---------------------------|---|
| 1. Rules for good health. | 2. A healthy village                        |
| 3. How the body works.    | 4. How disease is spread                    |
| 5. Simple treatments.     | 6. Care of elderly                          |
| 7. Itch.                  | 8. Signs of illness and treatment           |
| 9. Food, what it does.    | 10. Food, what we eat                       |
| 11. Nursing the sick.     | 12. Care before, during and after the birth |
| 13. Eyes.                 | 14. Tuberculosis                            |
| 15. Village water supply. | 16. Accidents                               |
| 17. Worms.                | 18. Smallpox and other infectious diseases  |
| 19. Skin diseases.        | 20. Leprosy                                 |

A participatory approach was taken in teaching these new facts about health. The Church or village leaders learned from the Hospital health talks and training and communicated what they had learned to their own village people. An example of simple health teaching methods outlined was:<sup>14</sup>

1. Health teaching in Hospital
  - a. Posters in Out-Patient Hall: Picture to speak for themselves
  - b. Group teaching in wards
  - c. Example in Hospital
2. Health teaching in villages
 

This is many sided, touch every aspect of home and family, involve father, mother children and include house, garden, street and fields.
3. The health teacher
  - a. Be practical, b. Be simple, c. Be one of them, d. Be patient e. Make the most of opportunities
4. How to teach in a village
  - a. Home visitation, b. Health talks, c. Health songs, d. Dialogue, e. Demonstrations.
5. How to reach everyone
  - a. Through local talent and leadership, b. Train church workers, c. Health education in local centres, d. Health teaching at pastors' training, lay training, women's group, village Bible classes, e. Health literature in Kui.

Health instructions or messages were put across to people using posters, flannel graphs and illustrations, and simple health songs were composed to communicate in similar interesting ways. These were found to be effective in helping people to learn and follow the instructions. Simple songs about health care, as well as literacy development, were composed and compiled into booklets in Kui. These songs giving health advices communicated in interesting ways about germs, mosquitoes and flies as enemies of health or the benefits of drinking milk for good

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<sup>14</sup> This and other materials on family and rural health care tips and teachings are accessed in the personal files of missionary nurse Joyce Henry. They include "Health Talk on Flies", "Syllabus of Health Education", "The Papaya Song", "Family Health" and other booklets.

health. Some of them were originally written in English and then translated into Kui. I quote parts of three songs below:<sup>15</sup>

### Fly song

War on flies with all your might, they are our enemies,  
The dirt they bring is killing us and all our families.  
On their legs are many whiskers, wallowing in the mire,  
Sitting on our food they bring us consequences dire.  
So from flies it's plain to see diseases and sickness come  
We'll never leave uncovered food for flies to sit upon.

### Health song

Hark to the words of this sweet little song, what must I do be healthy and strong?  
Milk is good, it builds you up, Then drink it every day.  
Ev'ry fly's your enemy, Then swat it till it's dead.

### Healthy Christian Family

Mothers, fathers all of you, hear our call today,  
Our children are God's gift to us, to care for them we pray  
Good food, clean clothes, good habits and our daily loving care  
Will keep our children fit and well with happiness to share.

Timely immunization was now possible through the Hospital team. During epidemics of cholera and smallpox a medical team with doctors, nurses and attendants reached the affected areas, provided treatment and saved lives besides preventing its spread. Primary health care was all the more important for its wider reach and large numbers could be given health, hygiene and sanitation training. The Health Education syllabus claimed in a concluding remark, "we had 30 centres each month and so contacted some 2000 folk regularly" through duplicated health talks and songs using local leaders.<sup>16</sup> Missionary wives and senior women leaders conducted classes among wives and young girls and classes included literacy, 'health talks' and house keeping together with Bible lessons.<sup>17</sup> The primary health care programme was important at a time when Medical Missions elsewhere were largely focusing on individual cure in their Mission hospitals as Dr McGilvray points out,

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<sup>15</sup> Booklet titled *Reha Gadi* or Happy Songs. Cuttack: Orissa Mission Press, 1965, contained thirteen health songs.

<sup>16</sup> *Health Teaching*. Typed unpublished notes.

<sup>17</sup> Residential Class at Sunapanga. Typed note programme sheet.

When the first national surveys of church-related medical programmes in less developed countries were undertaken in 1963, it was found that 95% were hospital and clinic-based, offering curative services to those who came for them. Little was being done for those who could not come because of distance, poverty or fear.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, many nurses and lab technicians who were trained in the Hospital went to work in other government hospitals in the state, extending the Mission hospital's contribution beyond the Kondh hills. The Hospital and its programmes thrived until the middle of the 1980s. After government funding was discontinued expansion work and procuring costly medicines were affected. And after the departure of missionary doctors other administrative problems appeared and finally by the 1990s the hospital closed down and remains closed today.

### **5. Medical Mission and the Christian Practice**

However, the forty years or so service of the Hospital brought a new approach to health and healing and its practices were Christian. The training and methods of the medical doctors and nurses were different from that of the Kui priest doctors. The experiences of the patients in the hands of these medical professionals were also different. So also the experience of those who had to stay in the hospital and went through the daily nursing and care was markedly different from anything experienced before in terms of treatment. In many cases the longer the stay in the hospital the greater the influence of its care and compassion. The facility modern medical science and medicine brought to the hills transformed the lives of many bringing healing and also new knowledge of the causes of sickness.

The doctors were at the same time missionaries and similarly their missionary nurse colleagues. They treated and administered medicine but a lot of emphasis and attention was also given to personal care and nursing. Both professional and personal services were emphasised and demanded in the medical mission. The Mission's preaching of the gospel of love and compassion demanded that the same must be shown in action as far as possible and especially when the people were so poor and there was so much sickness. Poverty and sickness have been inter-dependent in this region. Missionaries also became increasingly convinced that the credibility of the gospel to the Kui could come through the power of Christian healing of the medical mission. Dr Stanley Thomas declared that "The immediate purpose of the Hospital

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<sup>18</sup> McGilvray, Dr J. "Community Health" in Browne, S G, Davey, F and Thomson, WAR (Ed). *Heralds of Health: The Saga of Christian Medical Initiatives*. London: Christian Medical Fellowship, 1985, p. 270.

was to “Heal the sick” a phrase he was consciously repeating from Dr Moorshead, the medical secretary of BMS, who emphasised this command of Jesus to his disciples, in medical mission policy.<sup>19</sup> The missionary doctors and the nurses brought medical professionalism and achieved much success in healing and saving many lives. They also impacted through their personal lives, lived in the spirit of a missionary, often not allowing compromises. Their life-style and services were appreciated and respected by many. However, the missionary financial policy was not acceptable to many Indian colleagues, who were professional enough but admittedly not missionaries. The principle of low salary and high commitment in service, a missionary motive, did not transfer well to non-missionary doctors.

The medical mission emphasised what it called the “whole person medicine”. Not just dispensing drugs but caring for the person affected by the pain and suffering, in kindness, love, care and attention by the members of the staff as far as possible. “This is what we call the ‘whole person medicine’ - being the treatment of body, mind and spirit” said Dr Thomas.<sup>20</sup> To this he adds the other vital dimension of mission healing practice,

Prayer I believe adds another dimension to the healing process. Science has given us amazing new tools for dealing with diseases, but there remains in each of us a spiritual core, (called “soul” or “spirit” what you will) and prayer is the therapy that can bring healing into that realm and so to the whole person.<sup>21</sup>

The Christian medical doctors, trained in medical science, also believed that prayer was vital and necessary component in the healing process. Therefore prayer for the healing of sickness and for divine assistance to the doctor and nurses in their treatment was a regular feature in the medical mission practice. The Mission Hospital emphasised kindness and love in dealing with the patients, and the staff were trained in this regard to reach out to the total need of the patient. In other words the medical mission had the gospel as its philosophical and moral basis in the treatment of the sick.

In the Hospital, Sunday services were conducted regularly and separate prayers were offered in all the different wards daily. A Chaplain’s service was employed to counsel and to pray with the patients. The regular religious services in

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas, Stanley. *Journey Into Wholeness*, p. 170. See Moorshead, Fletcher R. *Heal the Sick: The Story of the Medical Mission Auxiliary of the Baptist Missionary Society*. London, 1929.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas, Stanley. *Journey Into Wholeness*, p. 93.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p. 86.

the Hospital stated the Christian view of healing which was faith in God, and prayer was as important to healing as medicine and nursing. The staff worked in close association with the Church. They preached, counselled and advised from the gospel, and sometimes contributed money from their salary towards evangelistic work.

## B. Healing and Religion in Tribal and Christian Faith

It is true that the tribals lacked the modern concept of health, western drugs or the emphasis on biological causes of sickness, but they had their own medicine and complex healing methods and bodily health was all-important to them. Yet health and healing were not just physical and included the whole being. The ailments and the healing were linked to the concerned spirits' influences. The concept of healing included total wellbeing in which the humans, the family, the land, its productivity and the unseen forces were all linked, inter-dependent, and had to be in proper relationship with each other. A breakdown in relationship affected health, and proper relationship was necessary for healing. For the restoration of relationship, and to ensure healing, the process of treatment included medicine and sacrificial rituals by the priest-doctors.

The Mission hospital brought advanced treatment and western medicines to the Kondh hills and modern medical treatment became a central part of its mission work. However, medical missionaries regarded their medicines and the knowledge and skills of the doctor as gifts of God. In the missionary hands medical science was a God-given tool for service to the sick and the suffering.<sup>22</sup> The missionary concept of healing was also holistic; healing was to be extended to the entire being. They emphasised wholeness; physical health was linked to emotional, moral and spiritual health, and relation between humans, and between humans and the Creator God was important in the mission healing practice. Missionary doctors demonstrated their dependence on prayer for healing as well as on the medicines.

By early 20<sup>th</sup> century medical mission was an accepted fact and the BMS had its Medical Mission Auxiliary, and a prominent Secretary Dr Fletcher Moorshead, a leading apologist of medical mission.<sup>23</sup> He had taken a keen interest in a hospital for the Kondhs, but he died before it was built. He had argued that the Kui people, suffering so many sicknesses and deprived of modern medical facilities and effective

<sup>22</sup> Lowe, John. *Medical Missions: Their Place and Power*. London: T Fisher Unwin, 1886.

<sup>23</sup> Moorshead, Fletcher R. *The Way of the Doctor: A Study of Medical Missions*. London, 1926 and *Heal the Sick: The Story of the Medical Mission Auxiliary of the Baptist Missionary Society*. London, 1929.



treatment, would believe the missionaries and their gospel if only missionary doctors could come to their rescue in delivering them from their miseries. He said,

Let us harness the forces of science to the chariots of the gospel, and displace these priest-doctors by preacher-healers, and mercy and truth shall disperse superstition and reign victorious among the Konds.<sup>24</sup>

But like doctors of his fraternity and profession, he had dismissed the tribal practice as ‘superstition’ and ‘ignorance’. In their eagerness to provide the wonder drug of modern medicine missionaries had ignored and dismissed the tribal practice altogether. And Millman, like some missionaries of his time, described the “Konds are animists...when trouble is heavy upon them they send for their village priest. His methods are a mixture of cunning witchcraft, religious fear and gross ignorance.”<sup>25</sup> But Boal, of the younger generation missionary saw it differently, “Many of them (priest-doctors) seem genuinely to try to fulfil their responsibility to their community” and the pull towards “living by trickery or unfair methods ...is to some extent curbed by the system of ‘No cure no pay’.”<sup>26</sup>

However, unknown to Dr Moorshead, one thing was common between his tribal ‘priest-doctor’ and the missionary ‘preacher-healer’. Both recognised, mentally and by their faith, the relation between healing and religion or the power of God/spirit. Both invoked or approved the invocation of this power of the divine before or during their practice for healing. For both, God or gods were believed to be the real healer and to be involved in the practice of healing. This concept of wholeness and the spirituality of the medical mission have indeed helped to give, through its Christian healing, ‘a glimpse of the gospel’ to all who utilised the services of the medical mission. The Mission’s medical practice was synonymous with Christian healing and Christian care and success in healing were linked to the credibility of the gospel. The Kui converts testify to the power of the Christian God they recognised in the healing through the medical mission. The hospital affirmed, “Missionary hospitals are some-times criticized for neglecting their missionary purpose. That criticism cannot be directed against the Moorshead Memorial Christian Hospital at Udaygiri in Orissa.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Carey, Pearce. *Dawn on the Kond Hills*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 90.

<sup>26</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Konds*, p. 88.

<sup>27</sup> “Healers and Preachers Too” in *Missionary Herald*, December, 1962, p. 189.

### C. Medical Mission: Priority of Service or Inducement for Conversion?

The Baptists in Orissa were less known for their medical work, but nevertheless they ran three hospitals, mostly in deprived areas (Berhampore, Diptipur and Udaygiri) and focused primarily on the less privileged and the neglected. It was Christian humanitarian concern which drew the Baptist Mission to medical involvement in Orissa, which was in response to the suffering of the pilgrims on their foot journey to Jagannath in Puri. In the Kondh hills, the medical mission was in response to the endemic sickness the hills people suffered, and later became more central to its work. The lay or non-medical pioneers were confronted by appalling medical needs. Many pilgrims to and from Puri Jagannath were falling sick and dying on their way. "The suffering pilgrims begged for help to the missionaries", writes Manjusri Dhall from Sutton's report.<sup>28</sup> A good amount of time and energy was spent attending to the sick, diseased from poverty, lack of effective treatment, and the exhaustive pilgrimages,

bodily ailments of the people demand a large portion of the missionaries' time and attention. Our earliest journals detail our daily attempts at alleviating the miseries induced by the Car Festival as well as ordinary calls upon us for the relief of the sick and afflicted.<sup>29</sup>

In the American Baptist hospital in Balasore "The pilgrims, on their return journey from Juggernath, have usually afforded a large number of patients."<sup>30</sup> The BMS hospitals started in Pipli (later closed down), Berhampur (1900) and in Diptipur, Bolangir (1913) began small, often functioning from the missionary's house and gave out first-aid and basic drugs to children and women who came seeking medicine from the missionary. The Mission hospital in the Kondh hills was in response to the sicknesses they suffered and the lack of medical care.

Missionary response, whether it was to the sick pilgrims, the poor women or the sick of the remote forest areas was rather Christian response to human tragedies, as it was in the rescue of Meria victims or famine relief of 1866 (the Great Orissa Famine). They were responding to the local situation, to the local needs and neglect. Dhall remarked,

The hospitals opened by...missionaries at Balasore and Jellasore (Jaleswar) were not done with the intention of gaining converts to Christianity...Caring for the poor and

<sup>28</sup> Dhall, M. *The British Rule*, p. 257.

<sup>29</sup> Sutton, Amos. *Orissa and its Evangelization*. Calcutta: Derly Wilkins and Sons, 1850, p. 314.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 315.

the sick did not bring any direct result in the form of conversion to Christianity. Nevertheless it softened the hardened attitude of the people towards this religion.<sup>31</sup>

The missionary response was also in imitation of Christ who went about healing the sick and the diseased. Christian failure and neglect to attend to pain and sickness and causes of mortality was argued as indirect murder, and mission was useless “in speculating on the eternal future of the heathen when their present is so pitiable; it would be more appropriate to reflect on that of those who, in possession of both the gospel and medicine, withhold them from the needy”, quoted Walls from Dr Dowkontt, secretary of the International Medical Missionary Society in 1881.<sup>32</sup>

However, not all missionaries were equally convinced about the medical mission. Preaching the gospel was thought to be the job of the missionary. Initially some Orissa missionaries did not think highly of the medical mission and made a distinction between Christian and humanitarian concerns.

It is true all this does not save the soul, neither in itself considered, does it advance the sinner a single step in the way to heaven; but it affords many opportunities of communicating religious truth which could not otherwise be enjoyed, and that, too when the heart is softened by affliction and sorrow.<sup>33</sup>

Saving the soul was regarded as the high calling and not saving the body; a contradiction in the light of Christ's second command and in contrast to the ‘Good Samaritan’ model in which context it was given. However, this was the exception rather than the trend. Dr VanReken argued that with the advance in medical science in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and the transformation it was bringing in the control of diseases and to human health, missionaries increasingly got involved in medical mission as they were already working among the poor and sick in some most remote places.<sup>34</sup> Andrew Walls has observed in mission history four broad reasons for medical mission. He calls them first ‘imitative’ or ‘obedienciary’ reasons where Christ is imitated as one ‘who went about doing good’ and also commanded his disciples to ‘heal the sick’; secondly, the ‘humanitarian’ or the ‘philanthropic’ reason where the missionary responded to the physical suffering of people; thirdly,

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<sup>31</sup> Dhall, M. *The British Rule*, p. 257.

<sup>32</sup> Walls, A. “The Heavy Artillery of the Missionary Army: The Domestic Importance of the Nineteenth Century Medical Missionary.” in Sheils, W J (Ed). *The Church and Healing*: Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982, p. 289.

<sup>33</sup> Sutton, A. *Orissa and its Evangelization*, p. 315.

<sup>34</sup> VanReken, Dr David. “Mission and Ministry: Christian Medical Practice in Today's Changing World Cultures”. Source Internet: <http://bgc.gospelcom.net/emis/vrekenmono/vrekenpref.htm> (Accessed 13 July, 2004).

utilitarian reasons which related to the missionary him/herself, and doctors were sent to deal with the danger of missionary mortality and enhancing their efficiency; and then the 'strategic' reasons to make the gospel acceptable where other forms of mission were not accepted.<sup>35</sup>

However, all the above reasons could be evident in the different circumstances and context in which the Orissa missionaries worked. They overlap and cannot be categorised separately. Missionary 'humanitarian' concern cannot be without 'Christian' concerns and similarly the 'strategic' reason was not purely a means to an end. The early missionaries learned the rudiments of first-aid and basic medication so that they could treat their own medical problems and also treat others in their care.<sup>36</sup>

Missionaries' involvement with physical suffering was obligatory to their faith and practice. The humanitarian response was but Christian compassion and kindness which they were extending even long before the professional medical help arrived. Priority of service is one of the central commands in Christian faith. The 'good Samaritan' is the model (Luke. 10:25-37 NIV). In Christian faith and mission the service to the sick, food to the hungry, water to the thirsty or clothing to the naked was directly a service to Christ himself because he had said "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew. 25: 35-40 NIV). Mission hospital facilities were extended to all without discrimination and did not give priority to Christians. The service was given to all those in need and medical mission among the poor was a part of Christian duty and obligation.

#### D. Illnesses and their Effects

The Kondh hills were one of the most neglected in terms of medical care and sickness was common due to the endemic illnesses caused by malnutrition, wildlife and epidemics on the one hand and the government apathy and neglect of the tribal hills on the other. The medical mission acquired significance and its impact was deeply felt in such a situation of deprivation. The appreciation and acceptance of the Mission's medical ministry were proportionate to the suffering, pain and anxiety people long endured. Besides affecting people physically, they had impact on mind and thinking. To understand the role of the medical mission in this context and the

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<sup>35</sup> Walls, A. "The Heavy Artillery of Missionary Army"p. 188.

<sup>36</sup> Van Reken, Dr David. *Mission and Ministry: Christian Medical Practice in Today's Changing Culture*. Wheaton: EMIS On-Line Publication, 1986.

transformation it brought it is necessary to understand the extent and intensity of the sicknesses and the diseases people suffered. Malaria was a major problem and the most common form of sickness was fever. Kui people, in contrast to the Whites and plains people, had better resistance against malaria but not total immunity and suffered from it quite often.

The commonest complaint for adult and children alike was *nomeri*, fever. This could be from many causes but was usually malaria. This was dormant in most peoples' blood and was lit up by any accident or illness. It was the background to all our work and deserves a special mention...An index of the prevalence of malaria in a community is the 'spleen rate'...Anything over fifty per cent is called 'hyper-endemic', in the Kond Hills we always found it to be about eighty per cent.<sup>37</sup>

Lack of food security and of adequate nutrition was also detrimental to health. Many suffered from hunger for months during 'hungry season' of the year. Food from the harvest lasted part of the year for the average population and for the rest of the year they depended on the shrinking forest resources. The notable and most unusual of their forest food sources perhaps was the mango kernel, something only the hills poor people eat as food. Wilkins wrote,

There was a severe out-break of food-poisoning, gastro-enteritis. One patient died and others were seriously ill. The only food they had all eaten were cakes made from mango kernels which were eaten at that season of the year...the 'hungry season' began about May by which time last year's rice had finished, and for several months millets and new season's rice were not available. Parents ate less and less to give the children what they could. Berries, leaves and roots were searched for in the forest, and even the pith of the palm trees, which had no appreciable food value, was eaten to fill bellies.<sup>38</sup>

People in tribal areas still continue to eat mango kernel and some deaths are reported regularly.<sup>39</sup> It has a stringent taste and contains tannins which can cause food poisoning if the flour is not washed carefully and enough. Wilkins found sore eyes, night blindness, scabies, worms of many kinds and anaemia as common problems of sickness, and even syphilis, gonorrhoea and rabies were present. Many in the elderly population were affected by cataract and blinded, a particular misery of

<sup>37</sup> Wilkins, Dr Gordon. *By Hands, Bullocks and Prayers: The Building of the Moorshead Memorial Hospital, Kond Hills, Orissa*. Worcestershire: Private publication, 1987, p. 39.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 145-148.

<sup>39</sup> *The Hindu* in its Business Line, Tuesday, September, 18, 2001, under the headline "Of Mango Kernels and Bottled Water" had reported "In July, we had continuous rains for four days. There were hardly any food grains in our house. Some ate mushrooms and some others else ate mango kernel. The lucky ones survived and the unlucky ones died," says one villager". Internet source accessed on 12 July, 2004. (<http://www.hinduonnet.com/businessline/2001/09/18/stories/141820gf.htm>)



the old. Between them Drs Wilkins and Thomas operated on hundreds of cataract patients, though both were general surgeons. Among the 123 school children Wilkins once examined 97% were found with hookworm eggs; and accepting 80% or above of haemoglobin as normal he found many below normal, one boy with 40% and another boy with 10%.<sup>40</sup>

The dreaded epidemics of small-pox and cholera were known to have been imported from the plains by the immigration of non-tribal people. They occurred frequently and caused large numbers of deaths in a short time. Dr Thomas wrote about one instance, “A group of men came to my office one day having walked 41 miles to tell me that smallpox was raging in their village and that 37 people had already died.”<sup>41</sup> One interview participant told the story of an incident of cholera which raged his village,

(Son told about his father) Cholera broke out in our area and his two brothers, their wives and children all died of cholera in a few days. He became all alone. He could not cultivate the lands he had. Then he was attacked by epilepsy. He tried all local medicines and also made many sacrifices but nothing helped. He went to Gudripori and he was cured by the Mission hospital. Then he became Christian, he was fifty at that time.<sup>42</sup>

Dr Thomas mentioned the prevalence of peptic ulcers “of which we saw very many cases...the primary cause of ulcers was a deficiency of protein in the diet.” He also listed “infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and leprosy” and “dangerous diseases such as typhoid, diphtheria and tetanus” were the other forms of sicknesses people suffered.<sup>43</sup>

The infant & maternal mortality was too high and this was a major concern and cause of much anxiety among many parents (similarly barrenness and childlessness cause great sadness in families). As late as 1997 the *District Statistical Handbook 1997, Kondhmal*, Orissa reported 1253 registered infant deaths against a total of 13272 registered births that year which suggests a rate of about 124 deaths per 1000 births.<sup>44</sup> The average figure for infant mortality in the whole of Orissa state (1997-99) was 96.9 and the national Indian average rate was 70.5 as published by the

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<sup>40</sup> Wilkins, G. *By Hands and Bullocks*, p. 126.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas, Stanley. *Journey Into Wholeness*. Derby: Moorley's Print and Publishing, 1994, p. 165.

<sup>42</sup> Interview # 33.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas, Stanley. *Journey Into Wholeness*, pp. 167-168.

<sup>44</sup> Government of Orissa. *District Statistical Handbook 1997 Kandhmahal*. Bhubaneswar: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Orissa, 1997, p. 59.

Census of India.<sup>45</sup> The impact of such frequent deaths in families was immense because it reduced the human power necessary for survival in a manual labour intensive economy and also for its cultural consequences. In my interviews some stories make it clear that the survival of infant(s) or family member(s) by the treatment of the Hospital was the turning point and led to faith in the gospel.

My father was worshipping all the spirits. Even then his six sons, my brothers, all died one after another. They did not live long after birth. (*Were they older to you or...*) No, they were all younger to me. ...My wife's three sisters had died before my marriage to her. My father told me "you go to the church and become a Christian." He was not a Christian himself but he told me to go ahead and become a Christian.<sup>46</sup>

...But I lost five children, five of my children died and I could not save any one of them. Desperately I was making all possible sacrifices. All my wealth was spent in many sacrifices. I wanted to save the lives of my children. They all would get fever. In few days they would die. In stead of medicine I made sacrifices, all kinds of offerings. The priest would tell me to do that...We both decided, husband and wife, we will become Christian. One night we took that decision to become Christian...We were beaten up by my wife's brother. But we endured all...After becoming Christian I have three boys and one girl. Daughter is married...<sup>47</sup>

A health survey carried out by government doctor Almas Ali reported that,

One of the most significant observations that has emerged from these studies relates to the high incidence of a genetic disorder, i.e, the deficiency of red-cell enzyme Glucose-6-Phosphate dehydrogenase (G-6-PD) among the Kuitia Kondhs. The incidence of sickle-cell disease was also quite high.<sup>48</sup>

The sickle cell related sickness affects many Kui and its treatment is still not successful. Both Drs Wilkins and Thomas mentioned about victims of accidents from wild beasts, fatal snake bites and burns as patients of the hospital. The dormant sick conditions like anaemia, enlarged spleen, worms and such other problems were more invisible and suffered silently.

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<sup>45</sup> Source: [http://www.censusindia.net/results/eci13\\_page1.html](http://www.censusindia.net/results/eci13_page1.html). Accessed on 12 July 2004. The figure for India published by the UNICEF (2000) gave 67 infant (under-1) deaths per 1000 and 97 child (under-5) deaths per 1000 and maternal mortality ratio as around 540 deaths per 100,000 live births. Source Internet. <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/india.html> (accessed 12 July 2004).

<sup>46</sup> Interview # 6.

<sup>47</sup> Interview # 30.

<sup>48</sup> Ali, Dr Almas. "Health Problems of Primitive Tribal Communities of Orissa" in *Adibasi*. Vol. XXIII, No. 2, July 1983, p. 46.

The effects of many and frequent illnesses without effective cure, even for simple and preventive ailments, were physically debilitating. But perhaps more, or equally devastating, was the mental agony and anxiety. Most sicknesses, small or serious, were life threatening in the absence of effective treatment and they caused fear, uncertainty and anxiety. The problems of sickness and high mortality were overwhelming and remained beyond them. It is no wonder that the Kui had elaborate sacrifices and rituals for sickness and healing.

Medical care and healing brought new life in the face of death and at the same time the Christian gospel of love and power of Christ preached and claimed by the mission rang true and became visible in the experience of the patient and to the family and community who also suffered in its member(s)' sickness. Questions about healing and true healer were raised and answered, in words and in actions of care and healing. The Kui sought and looked for the spirit's intervention in health and in sickness, in life and in death. And in medical healing they believed it was the power of the Lord (or the Jesus-god) which was involved in curing and saving them from sickness. In times of afflictions, diseases, pain and in the face of death the question of God's involvement and help was naturally raised, discussed and explained more intimately. It was easier to talk about God's power in healing.

## E. Medical Mission: The Social Gospel of Change

### 1. An Effective Mode of Communicating Christian Love and Care

Undoubtedly the medical mission communicated a powerful message about the Christian God. The gospel preached or claimed in the mission was made manifest through the medical service and its results. The Christian love and hope preached in a context of so much poverty, neglect, and suffering in sickness made sense when such claims were made visible in the healing and health brought in the lives or to the families of many. An all-rounded medical hospital facility and the wider primary health care and teaching brought transformation to the health situation of people and it was communication of the Christian gospel in a powerful and effective way.

The patients who were treated and healed in the Hospital and also those who attended them went home with the impression and experience of Christian care and healing. Some of these ex-patients were the most effective advertisements of the hospital treatment. They eagerly spread their story of healing experience and talked about the medical facility as unique to relatives and friends in their villages. Medical

mission demonstrated the social gospel of healing the sick and service to the bodily sufferers, reaching out to the sick in the hour of their need.

Medical treatment brought a new and revolutionary concept in care for the sick through nursing, assuring, comforting and removing fear along side medicine and surgery. The works or deeds of healing, and the care and kindness associated with it was a stronger and louder message that could not be ignored and indeed communicated. The love and care plus the resulting success were visible and stark. The care and compassion in contrast to the neglect and hopelessness suffered previously touched the hearts of the sufferer or rather the healed person. Care and kindness in times when it was most needed did matter deeply to people well known for their tribal honesty and integrity. So the Christian gospel and its message of hope proved to be true in life experience. Medical healing also gave confidence and hope to the sick who were healed and to the affected family and many of these ex-patients and their families became enthusiastic believers and also witnesses to others about the Christian healing they had experienced.

## **2. The Miracle of the Medical Drug**

Though the material culture of the missionary amazed the tribals but that did not necessarily prove the missionary religion true. The Mission bungalow coming up in the hills in 1908 was an object of amazement.<sup>49</sup> But that did not greatly help all the Kui to be amazed by what the missionary had to preach. However to the Pan minority, the socially low and despised, the gospel was attractive. They converted by the message of Christian equality and dignity.

The story of the Mission Hospital, its medical treatment brought to the people seemed a miracle to many. The Hospital came to symbolise healing power and its medicine, miracle drug. The missionary medicine was the wonder drug that saved lives from sickness or situations unthinkable before. The dreaded epidemics were being effectively controlled and the new message of primary health care and hygiene began to reach to interior villages. The life style and habits of Christians in terms of hygiene and use of medicine was changing and was noticeable to others.

The western medicine proved its obvious advantage over the existing tribal medicine. When sicknesses, considered most dreaded and terminal, were healed by the medical doctors there was real amazement at the power or efficacy of the modern western medicine. Modern medicine was the scientific equivalent to the miraculous

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<sup>49</sup> Carey, Pearce. *Dawn on the Kond Hills*, p. 61.

healings of the old myths or stories. The young Christian church in the New Testament experienced many miraculous healings causing awe, wonder and amazement among those healed or witnessed which lead to 'more and more believed in the Lord' (Acts 5: 12-16) or in other words causing large scale conversions. In Acts Chapter 3 when Peter healed a crippled beggar and "when all the people saw him walking...they were filled with wonder and amazement..."(Acts 3: 9-10). Stanley Thomas wrote that some experiences of healing during his service years in the Moorshead Memorial Hospital could be like the raising of the dead of the scripture stories.

In our Hospital we very often used those words ("He is more dead than alive") when referring to some of the patients who came to us. It may be a person, very often a child with severe anaemia, and we have seen some with only 13% of normal haemoglobin; a case of severe pulmonary tuberculosis or advanced diabetes, all of them near to death but each case saved by remedies perfected through medical science.<sup>50</sup>

The thriving days of the Hospital were even before the days of the wonder antibiotics. Quinine and Sulpha drugs were effective drugs and the latest and a precursor to antibiotics was M & B 693. Some missionary wives also taught men and women to make use of locally available ingredients like salt and turmeric for disinfection or castor oil as a form of ointment. However, Dr Thomas' surgery skills became well known in the state. Tribals and non-tribals alike put much trust in the treatment and were impressed by the service provided. The Hospital remained busy as the only one in the Kondh hills.

The converts have testified that they now use the Hospital medicine rather than the traditional medicine and its ritual practice. They visit the Hospital in times of sickness and believe only in modern medicine. There is more trust in Hospital treatment and in its medicine which has caused loss of trust in the efficacy of traditional medicine. In the introduction of western medicine and modern treatment tribal medicine faced a challenge and increasingly lost favour. The following extracts from my interviews suggest that not only did they prefer the Hospital medicine but rejected everything of the traditional healing practice.

... we are better now. There is food to eat, children are fine, no severe sickness. When there is fever or something we go to the hospital, no puja (rituals), no sacrifice. No puja, completely left it. There is the

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<sup>50</sup> Thomas, S. *Journey Into Wholeness*, p. 154.



Lord...whenever we are sick we go to the hospital, getting healed and loving the Lord.<sup>51</sup>

Now a days there are doctors here but before there was no such facility. So we could not get any help from doctors. We did not know about the diseases as we know now. Earlier the priest eat our chicken, he was cheating... Now whatever we spend for the doctor is for our cure. And after becoming Christian no such expenses.<sup>52</sup>

Some modern knowledge of sickness, of sanitation and hygiene and even the drug itself is claimed by the users of western medicine as the source of their confidence in the medical treatment, medicine and its practices. Western medicine therefore became the wonder drug when it could ward off any power of the spirit that earlier caused sickness. Medicine and treatment brought visible change through health and healing. It was Kui pragmatism which accepted what worked for them and was willing to discard the old practice which proved to be useless. When smallpox was successfully eradicated and wiped out of Kondh villages the rituals performed in apprehension of its attack also stopped and gradually fell out of practice.

And perhaps the same pragmatism causes them to continue the death rituals which are yet slow to disappear altogether. Some still practiced in secret as open practice will be condemned by the Church.

### **3. The Wholeness of Healing Leading to Faith in the Healer**

Together with physical healing a healthy mind and spirit was emphasised in the mission. So it was not only professionalism but also a moral and righteous life style which the Hospital ministry tried to emphasise in its ministry. Medical mission made a holistic approach to sickness where other dimensions of healing were recognised. Faith in God's healing power and prayer for healing was an integral part of the Christian healing of the Hospital. Doctors admitted that they treat, perform surgery and administer medicine but the healing comes from God. It was necessary to depend as much on prayer for healing as on treatment and medicine. Therefore, through healing, people were brought to the knowledge and faith in Christ.

Moral, ethical and spiritual relationships were as much important to health and healing as medicine and treatment and were emphasised in the medical mission. Church spirituality was practiced and promoted among all the staff. Preaching of the

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<sup>51</sup> Interview # 18.

<sup>52</sup> Interview # 22.

life and works of Christ and his call to all people to have faith in his power of healing and forgiveness was openly made. There is a direct relationship between the influence of the Hospital during its thriving days in the 1950s to 70s and the large conversion movement among the tribal Kondhs at the same time. The Hospital doctors' successful treatment and control of sickness or epidemics also implied control over the spirits believed to be the cause of such epidemics. The conversions in Therabadi village, which lay at the beginning of the tribal dominated Kondh areas south of the Mission centre, was following an outbreak of smallpox in that area. The Hospital opened a Camp there and treated and saved many lives from this illness.

The mission saw and stressed other dimensions of healing and so also paralleled the tribal concept of rituals which sought the cosmic wellbeing in which a right relationship between human beings, the gods and the land is believed to promote the state of true health and wellbeing. The belief that treatment is human and healing is divine was true to both the tribal and the Christian. Therefore it was not difficult for the Kui to accept the power of God or the dimension of the Spirit in the Mission's practice of healing and wholeness. Some ex-members of the medical staff I interviewed were appreciative and even nostalgic about the great days of the Hospital. One pointed out the spiritual work of the Hospital and how much the Hospital had been a strong spiritual influence in the Kondh hills. Another narrated some aspects of Hospital ministry and also pointed out some of the internal problems it faced.

I joined as a staff nurse (male) and later became the Nursing Superintendent. I have worked under many missionary doctors like Dr. Thomas, Dr McLaren, Dr Smith, Dr. Hart and others. Our local Christian doctors were Dr Singh, Dr Jayananda, Dr Murty, Dr Milton, Dr Kispotta and also a number of Hindu doctors like Dr Parija and Dr Pattnaik and many others were our best doctors. Hospital appointed Chaplains and we had regular Chaplaincy work. I have worked with Sister Smith, Irene Wright, Sargent, Webb, Serier, Coggins and others. Kurunga Naik, Daud Pradhan, Daniel Pradhan and Situda Naik were some of our hospital Chaplains. Prayers were very regularly done, staff prayer separately among the staff and ward prayer in each ward with patients were all very regular. Preaching also was a part of the medical service. Some of us took training in evangelism and Bible knowledge. When we used to have outdoor Health Camps in villages we would start the work after prayer. The people believed in the power of prayer as well as medicine. The Mission hospital has made a tremendous Christian influence. We felt the presence of God in this hospital. The hospital was famous for its doctors and successful treatment. We also provided counselling, advice and assurance of God to

hundreds and thousands who came here. It is a pity that we could not maintain this hospital and now it is closed, for about ten years now.<sup>53</sup>

After work and on Sundays some hospital staff used to visit villages in nearby areas and also distant places. They used to meet old patients and talked to villagers on hygiene, clean habits, washing etc. and also told about the gospel. Some patients in hospital became Christian after getting cured from serious sickness...Missionaries began to give more attention to Oriya patients from the plains to raise more money. They said that was necessary and the only way to subsidize the treatment of local poor patients...Dr Jayananda Mallick was our first Kui Christian doctor but he left the hospital because Dr Thomas was not willing to raise his salary. See, the missionary was both doctor and missionary but our local doctor was not a missionary. He was a professional. He had a large family to support. Being the eldest he was expected to take care of the education of his other siblings. He could not work with such a low salary.<sup>54</sup>

The Moorshead Mission Hospital, perhaps more than the other small Baptist hospitals of Orissa made a strong Christian impact and played a greater role as a social and religious change agent. Many of the Hospital's Christian staff were eager and zealous preachers and ministers. Some were trained in evangelism and Bible knowledge and helped the Church in its ministry and evangelism. The Hospital has surely proved an open door for the penetration of the gospel. Almost all patients heard the gospel and many were converted. The more serious the sickness and longer the stay in Hospital the greater the impact of the Christian service on the patient.

At every opportunity village people were given Primary Health Training in water, sanitation, hygiene and nutrition. As said before simple health songs were composed with message about health. Dr Thomas composed one:

Hark to the words of this sweet little song  
What must I do be healthy and strong?  
Milk is good, it builds you up  
Then drink it every day.

Health talks were also included during annual Church celebrations such as the Great Meeting or *Deri Sabha*. The newly converted villages were taught about personal hygiene and keeping the village street and water sources clean. In this regard training to women was given regularly, both in literacy and in Primary Health Care.

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<sup>53</sup> Interview # 43.

<sup>54</sup> Interview # 19.

The Hospital was also uniquely placed as no government doctor was available and government medical care remained pathetically scanty with a small dispensary and irregular service before the Mission Hospital was opened. The Mission Hospital was the one and only hope to a people of a large area like the Kondhmals. Its doctors and staff risked their own health and worked in the frontline of the battle against disease and sickness in the hills which were dreaded as inhospitable, backward or infested with killer malaria. Some of the doctors especially acquired a reputation of God-like healers when some of their patients were cured from hopeless conditions, snatched from the jaws of death or received assuring personal care. The medical mission's culture of kindness and personal care was the additional factor which could gain peoples' confidence and trust in Christian healing.

## Conclusion

The message of the medical mission was powerful and established the credibility of the gospel. It communicated the message of the gospel in action, in the ministry of healing and accompanied the words of prayer as well. Care and nursing in the medical practice of the Hospital was refreshing and comforting elements of the medical healing process. Traditional healing focused more on rituals and less on the sickness and the patient. Some methods enhanced pain and in any case casualties were high.

The Kondhs who believed in the relation of healing to the power of the spirits understood the religious and faith element in Christian medical practice, the healing Christ in medical counselling by the staff did make sense to the users of hospital and its medicine. Modern wonder drug, scientific treatment and surgery bringing quick healing and relief from pain have been the modern equivalent of the miraculous healing of the Bible and did have its powerful effect on the Kondhs. The experience of healing and relief from pain created the deepest faith.

The more pragmatic Kondhs were quick to change to modern medicine and substituted it for their traditional medicine. Traditional healing practices faced the toughest challenge from the medical practices and began to lose badly against the obvious advantages of western medicine. Many tribal remedies with proven medicinal value have suffered in the process. The ancient knowledge and practices of natural and local medicine of the Kui are increasingly falling to disuse and are despised.

## Chapter Seven

### The Indigenous Agents of Conversion The Kui as Communicators and Actors in their Conversion

*...the agents themselves act not so much as rebels or revolutionaries as they do as individuals trying to make their way in life, seeking to balance the estimations and pressures of others who judge them against changing circumstances and their own interests, goals, and ambitions.<sup>1</sup>*

*“Well, no one told me, I myself found out. I found out about Christians and we became Christian...They knew that by sacrifice you could not help the fever go. We came to know from them that sacrifices don't help in healing fever.”* Convert

#### Introduction

The converts testify that from hearing, observing, reading or from experience and reflecting they learned about Christianity, and that the process involved many years. Key people in this process were fellow Kui Christians. In accounting for religious change, the converts' testimony or the participants' perspective is the fundamental reality. It is they who took their own time and made their final decision to convert or not to convert. The motivation, the manner and process of change and the meaning of conversion was theirs. The conversions took place in two major phases, first slowly among the minority Pans beginning from 1914, most Kondhs staying away, then from late 1950s among the Kondhs, which was a larger and more rapid conversion compared to that of the Pan. In both, the fellow Kuis, who shared the message or showed upward change in life-style and status, communicated and motivated their fellow members to change.

The evidence that the tribal Kondhs were agents of their own conversion contrasts with the theory locating subaltern conversions in a 'colonial design and desire'<sup>2</sup> in which such conversions are only 'proselytisation', 'forced assimilation'

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<sup>1</sup> Mines, Mattison. "Heterodox Lives: Agonistic Individuality and Agency in South Indian History" in Guha, R and Parry J P (Ed). *Institutions and Inequalities: Essays in Honour of André Beteille*. Oxford: OUP, 1999, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> Comaroff, Jean and John. *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*. London: University of Chicago Press, 1997. Also see Padel, F. *Sacrifice of Human Being: British Rule and Konds of Orissa* (1995) and Panikkar, K M. *Asia and Western Dominance: A Survey of the Vasco da Gama Epoch of Asian History, 1498-1945* (1959).



‘radical takeover of people’s will’ or ‘colonisation of the mind’.<sup>3</sup> The common concept is that conversions are achieved only by extraneous manipulations, where the tribals have been forced, bribed or pressured into an alien fold.<sup>4</sup> Micro studies and empirical research of tribal or low caste conversions reveal that it is the people who are choosing conversion rather than being converted.<sup>5</sup> Karlsson remarks that their conversions relate to their own interests and goals in life, their ‘own projects and desire and to their overall life situation’.<sup>6</sup> Gauri Viswanathan asserts,

I am therefore suggesting that conversion performs the epistemological function of negotiating differences in viewpoints. Yet historically the term “conversion” has been associated with violence and erasure rather than mobility and communication. ...Conversion’s proactive nature, combined with its manoeuvring between discrepant belief systems, makes it a powerful epistemological tool to face the broad challenges of a pluralistic society...conversion in post emancipation society, not as forcible assimilation but as intersubjective communication.<sup>7</sup>

The Kui not only heard the gospel but also engaged with it in critical and sufficient observation, reflecting on its relevance in their changing life situation and also the results and consequences of conversion. Boal observed that the Kondh action in conversion was deliberate and well thought out,

Nevertheless I maintain that it was not as ‘rice Christians’ that the Kond came into the Church, nor yet on the principle that ‘If you can’t beat them (the Pans), join them!’ On the contrary, I suggest that the Kond believed that it was in joining, even

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<sup>3</sup> For discussion on this subject see Stanley, Brian. “Conversion to Christianity: The Colonization of the Mind?” in *International Review of Mission*, vol. XCII, No. 366, July (2003) pp. 315-331 and Viswanathan, Gauri. “Literacy in the Eye of India’s Conversion Storm” in Mills, K and Grafton, A (Ed). *Conversion: Old Worlds and New*. New York: University of Rochester Press, 2003, pp. 271-291.

<sup>4</sup> India’s conversion debate originated since Gandhi’s famous distrust of missionization. The pivotal Niyogi Commission Report of 1954 on Christian mission work, and in recent years, the BJP and its affiliate Hindutva organisations have intensified campaign and debate against conversion. See Kim, Sebastian. *In Search of Identity: Debate on Religious Conversion in India*. Oxford: OUP, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> About Dalit conversions see Jayakumar, S. *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion: Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate*. Delhi: ISPCK, 1999 and on tribal conversions see Karlsson, B G. “Entering into the Christian Dharma: Contemporary “Tribal” Conversions in India” in Brown and Frykenberg (Ed). *Christians, Cultural Interactions and India’s Religious Traditions*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002. Also see Mattam, M and Kim, S (Ed). *Mission and Conversion: A Reappraisal*. Mumbai: St. Pauls, 1996; Raj, E S. *The Confusion Called Conversion* (Revised). New Delhi: TRACI, 1998; Hrangkhuma, F (Ed). *Christianity in India: Search for Liberation and Identity*. Delhi: ISPCK, 1998; Headlund, R E (Ed). *Christianity in India: The Emergence of an Indigenous Community*. Delhi: ISPCK, 2000 and Shah, G. “Conversion, Re-conversion and the State—Recent Events in the Dangs” in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 6 February (1999) 312-318.

<sup>6</sup> Karlsson, B G. “Entering into the Christian Dharma: Contemporary “Tribal” Conversions in India” in Brown and Frykenberg (Ed). *Christians, Cultural Interactions...*p. 135.

<sup>7</sup> Viswanathan, Gauri, “Literacy in the Eye of India’s Conversion Storm” pp. 276-277.

to the point of co-operating with Christian Pans, that they could expect in the long run to uphold their identity as Konds and maintain their pride of race.<sup>8</sup>

In this chapter I investigate the role of the Kondh converts as the agents of their own conversion seeing why and how the gospel message was communicated both socially downwards to the Pans and also upwards to the Kondhs, as both in their different social positions responded in conversion. Particularly, the late Kondh conversions out-did the Pan's in pace and persons, taking place in the post-independence era when the missionary strength was residual and receding fast. These conversions were unexpected. Indeed, in the year Donald McGavran, missiologist<sup>9</sup> and a missionary of the American Disciples of Christ, made a survey and recommended that the mission abandon any Kondh hope and concentrate on the Pans, that same year (1956) some Kondh men went and asked Christians in a distant village how to become Christian. That was the beginning of the Kondh conversion movement and the largest one in the hills so far.

#### A. McGavran's Study: Where it was both Flawed and Gave False Hope

The Kondh conversions were unexpected for the Mission. As part of an offer of co-operation with the Baptists by the United Christian Missionary Society of the American Disciples of Christ, McGavran was sent to study the mission in 1956. In his report and recommendations (which "with some sense of shock that the missionary staff faced the most significant fact that emerged from his study") he pointed out that the Church in the Kond Hills was not a Kond Church at all but overwhelmingly a Pan movement.<sup>10</sup> With detailed statistical comparison of the growth of the church, he reported,

What these figures describe is a Pano people movement which began about 1927, gained great power before the war, grew little during the war, had two good years in 46 and 47, and has grown slowly since then...Several of the preachers thought that Panos and Kuingas (Kondhs) in the proportion of 2000 and 320 Kuingas would be generous towards the Kuingas. One Kuinga said there were less than a hundred Kuingas in the Church.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Konds*, p. 223.

<sup>9</sup> For his theory of 'people movements' and 'Homogenous Unit Principle' see McGavran, Donald A. *Understanding Church Growth*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970. Also, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions*. New York: Friendship Press, 1955.

<sup>10</sup> Boal, Barbara, *The Konds*, p. 188.

<sup>11</sup> McGavran, D. "The Work and the Church in the Kond Hills", Unpublished Report, 1956, pp. 2-3. McGavran's report was also discussed by the Church Union's working committee (all Pans) and a response to this report was made by Rev Bruce Henry.

The term 'Kuingas' for the Kondhs, were used in some areas. McGavran stressed that the Mission should concentrate on the Pans—"this fine people...the responsive community...God's chosen people"—and "it should be concluded that at this time the Kuingas (Kondhs) are no more responsive than they have been for fifty years."<sup>12</sup> Therefore he recommended that the Mission for the present should hope for the Pans and abandon its "Kuinga Hope" which "in the past, I feel, deflected some effort from the responsive community."<sup>13</sup> He observed the Roman Catholics equally as aggressive rivals as the Hindus, "The presence of the aggressive Romans and Hindus now just beginning to be felt...the Romans get a start from one or two disgruntled Baptists..."<sup>14</sup>

McGavran's Church growth principle and numerical growth as his criterion of success was controversial and criticised.<sup>15</sup> The Baptists' response to this study, led by Rev Bruce Henry, while appreciating its "impartial appraisal", sharply criticised some of its recommendations, particularly the strategy for church growth, as "rather mechanical and even chemical at times." Henry remarked that the "suggestions seem some times as simple as hatching chicks in incubators."<sup>16</sup> McGavran's suggestion that the Mission provide tin roofs for the mud churches people build was also dismissed as "a bad idea". Both McGavran and the Baptists saw the Roman Catholics as aggressive rivals. McGavran suggested the Baptists "design a grand and permanent church" for the Kui but the Baptists rejected that for: "It smacks of show and pomp, and would fit in with the Roman procedure."<sup>17</sup>

At exactly the same time as McGavran-Henry deliberations of June 1956 and completely unknown to them, some Kondhs in two villages, independent of each other, were discussing and mulling over the idea of approaching Christian leaders for teaching and baptism. Boal writes, "...in the rainy season of 1956...the Srikeri villagers became actively interested. This was the very time when the Executive Committee in Gudripori was discussing Dr. McGavran's report."<sup>18</sup> In that same year in winter, and independent of the developments in Srikeri, the men of four related

<sup>12</sup> McGavran, D. "The Work and the Church in the Kond Hills", p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. pp. 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*. London: SPCK, 1995, pp. 124-140.

<sup>16</sup> Henry, Bruce. "Comments By BCR Henry on an Article Entitled The Work and the Church in the Kond Hills, By Donald McGavran" Unpublished Report, pp. 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Konds*, p. 189.

Kondh households of another village (Kurimaha) visited the Pastor at Raikia eighteen miles away and asked for baptism. The Christians not only grew in these two villages but also spread their influence to other villages, taking advantage of their strategic location close to the North-South main communication route. Both these Kondh villages (Srikeri and Kurimaha) were located adjoining the foot tracks that connected to important weekly markets in Balliguda and Raikia. Their conversion news and stories spread to other villages mainly through these markets where the stories of growing conversions among the Kondhs were regularly exchanged.

That was the beginning of an escalation of conversions among the Kondhs that continued all through the 60s and well into the 70s and it remained confined to the Kondhs in total contrast to the expectations, hopes and plans of the Mission and the McGavran report. The growth was also rapid and in five years, by 1961, fifty new *Kondh* churches came into being and by the end of that decade the number had reached to 249 worshipping communities.<sup>19</sup> The movement spread horizontally through the agnatic relations, family members and relatives influencing each other, each following their own decision process. The Orissa state government expressed concern about this rise in conversions and consequently a Bill, rather ironically entitled The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act 1968 was passed, mainly targeting the Kondhs and other tribal groups to curb conversions.<sup>20</sup>

## B. What Triggered the Kondh Move?

The precise reason for the trigger or provocation in 1956 cannot be exactly identified. However it was not a sudden decision by the people in these two Kondh villages. It needs to be seen as part of a gradual process which had already begun before this time. Two Pan churches had come up in the distant Kondh areas in the south of the Mission centre since 1946. Up to that time the churches were only within 14 miles of the Mission centre, in Pan and Oriya dominated areas. But those two Pan churches further away in the Kondh dominated areas became the living example of Christian religion for the Kondhs nearby. The main difference that marked out a Christian from a non-Christian is the absence of the practice of sacrifices. In 1951 three Kondhs and their wives in Srikeri had already become

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<sup>19</sup> *BMS Annual Report*, 1969.

<sup>20</sup> The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act 1967 in *Orissa Gazette*, Ext., No 1592, 13 December 1967.

Christian and in 1956 others in that village showed a willingness to convert. With that began an increasing interest in conversion.

The main Kondh areas were further away from the Mission centre in more interior places. Access to those areas was not easy, contact was less frequent and evangelism was less regular compared to the nearby Pan areas. The Mission's contact with the Pans and Oriyas was easier who lived nearer and closer to road communication. The closer proximity of the Pans plus the Pan desire for social emancipation and identity of equality was much stronger, and they were attracted to Christianity first. The Kondhs, not suffering an identity crisis, were socially not inclined to such mobility and also remained indifferent to Christianity.

However, like any culture Kondh culture is not static, their approach to traditional rituals is pragmatic and change was taking place. Boal says people who follow a religion of the Book preserve old rituals as per the Book but among the tribal people only those rituals remain in vogue which are relevant to life and some others become redundant and fall out of use.<sup>21</sup> For example, Kondh rituals performed in relation to smallpox almost disappeared due to the complete eradication of smallpox by government action. The ritual for the 'Spirit of the spring' was decreasing with hand pumps now providing drinking and bath water in many Kondh villages. On the other hand, the increasing exposure to and closing in of migrant population had broken their isolation. This was resulting in some degree of Hinduisation. Where the Pans became Christian near Kondh villages the Kondhs came across the Christian changes which included cutting off the long hair men used to keep, wearing clothes like Oriyas and being tidy, besides their stopping of sacrifices.

The transformation among the Pans living closer to Kondh dominated places or those in regular contact with them was beginning to affect the Kondhs. Conversions remained a gradual process by family(s), groups, a village or villages and over months and years going through a process. Often there were gaps of time between contact, observation, testing, teaching, learning the basics of Christian teaching and getting baptism. The Baptist Church made it mandatory to pass an exam in basic doctrine before being given baptism and membership. McGavran observed a long process of church admission where emphasis seems to be mental.

The expansion of the Church takes place spontaneously. When natural relationships result in one or more families become definitely interested, the pastor visits and

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<sup>21</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Kondhs*, p. 233.



instructs the group. He may ask a missionary to come and certainly will take with him lay leaders of his church and group as he is able. These will also exhort, instruct, and fellowship the inquirers. When the group is ready, the preacher, group officers, deacons, and elders, accompanied by an officer of the Union such as the Indian Supervisor (president) and by the missionary, will go to the village. They will baptize the converts *after examination*... The process of instruction and regular visitation begins after the new group has made its decision, and in the case of Kuingas, after they have thrown out their gods. Conversion takes place at the beginning of the process and is followed by a fairly *lengthy period of instruction*.<sup>22</sup>

The Kondhs too took their own time and followed their own decision process in which the 'wellbeing' of the people or the group is of utmost importance. What mattered and concerned *them* in the change is more important than the authenticity or authority of the source of the knowledge, idea or message. When offered from within, voices within speak about it and their own group or people accept. Then no further question is necessary and change becomes easy.

The mid 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed conversion movements among many Indian tribal and low caste communities. The dramatic conversions to Buddhism by the Mahars in Maharashtra took place in the same year as among the Kondhs (1956). The movement was led by B R Ambedkar, the outstanding Indian leader and in a massive public rally in Nagpur he declared the conversions of the 100 000 gathered Mahars to Buddhism.<sup>23</sup> While there seems to be no apparent connection between this with the Kondh conversions surging from that year,<sup>24</sup> the period witnessed many indigenous conversion movements in different parts of India, including in the Northeastern states like, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh besides in Orissa and Maharashtra.<sup>25</sup> The Mahars of Maharashtra were non-tribals and their conversion was a direct protest against the Hindu caste structure and oppression.

Several distinct developments in the background and foreground could be identified as contributing to these conversion movements, including those among the Kondhs. The message of emancipation and democratic ideas were catching up with the Dalits (low and out-castes) in the Gandhian and post-independence milieu, for the

<sup>22</sup> McGavran, D. "The Work and the Church in the Kond Hills", p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> See Omvedt, Gail. *Brief Description: Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1994.

<sup>24</sup> Boal does not make any mention of this about 100 000 Mahars' conversion to Buddhism in that same year in Maharashtra. Bruce Henry commented (in my personal interview) that it did not have any relation nor affected the Kondh conversions in any way. Boal and Henry were missionaries and resident in the Kondh hills at that time.

<sup>25</sup> Hrangkhuma, F (Ed). *Christianity in India: Search for Liberation and Identity*. Delhi: ISPCK, 1998.

caste structures, traditions and Hindu practices were restricting and suppressive to change and mobility for these depressed sections. The tribal Kondh on the other hand were coming under increasing pressures from Oriyanization, Hinduization, Christianization and de-tribalisation. The Pan conversions plus Oriyanizations on the outer fringe of the Kondh community and some basic internal dissatisfaction expressed about the old religion were affecting the Kondhs. The new Orissa government of independent India was extending a more direct and active administration of the tribal Kui area which the Kondhs commonly saw as Oriya rule replacing the British. The Kondhs were conscious and concerned about the change and its effects. In a sense, the Christian conversion was a result of a century of external pressure for change.

### C. The Effect of the Changing Political Situation

After the Kondh hills area had been declared Meria-free its administration was left mostly to the Oriya assistants. Bailey writes that for the next twenty five years (1855-1880) the Kondh hills was ruled by one Dinabandhu Patnaik holding office as Tahasildar "with unexampled ferocity...virtually a king in his own country, unchecked and unsupervised...his British Superintendent lived in Cuttack, then three weeks posting away."<sup>26</sup> The power of the British was felt only from time to time when law and order maintenance was necessary.<sup>27</sup> Mojumdar says "there was a virtual turn about in the British tribal policy from one of "civilising the barbarians" by alternate coercion and conciliation to protecting the "noble savages" by a paternalistic administration with *laissez faire* as its general note."<sup>28</sup> He further noted,

...the tribal tracts of the province, which, under the Government of India Act, 1935, had been declared "Partially Administered Areas" being beyond the pale of general administration of the province...the local people being treated by the Government as its protected wards who had better be kept away from the turbulent political currents then sweeping the regularly administered areas of the province...

A little more than a decade later, when the British rule in India ended, the tribal tracts were brought under regular administration, the local people drawn into the new political process...for the people the problem was one of adaptation to unaccustomed political force.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Bailey, F G. *Caste and the Economic Frontier: A Village in Highland Orissa*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959, p. 29.

<sup>27</sup> With the exception of J Ollenbach, Magistrate of the Kondhmals from 1901 to 1924.

<sup>28</sup> Mojumdar, K. *Changing Tribal Life in British Orissa*. New Delhi: Kavery Books, 1998, p. 138.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. 113.

Behera observes that Kondhs were reconciled to the British to the extent that they "accepted them as their Ma-Bap (Mother-Father) to regulate their affairs, welfare and destiny as well." But in fact the distant hills' villages and interior Kondh areas remained virtually unadministered. The Kondhs in more accessible areas grudgingly *acquiesced* to administration by Oriya assistants of the British. Importantly, the tribal land was exempted from tax by the British.

The tribal-non tribal acculturation process had been going on for centuries, predating the British, but the process was slow and to a degree that the subalterns could control. But the British wanted increasing interaction between the Kondhs and the plains Oriyas and more integration with the plains culture to revive the Kondh culture, opening a floodgate of cultural and commercial invasion which was overwhelming to the Kondhs, and led to their exploitation. Among the large number of migrants included distillers, traders and money lenders in addition to the few government workers. The commercial distillers, called Sundis, brought one of the worst drinking cultures and addictions among the Kondhs to which many fell victim.<sup>30</sup>

The introduction of good roads, transport, weekly markets, consumer goods from the plains, tribals' visits to Hindu festivals and the imposition of Oriya in education and business were expected to revitalise the tribal culture and economy but actually boomeranged on the tribals, setting in process a rapid Hinduisation of tribals with alien values of the migrants' culture threatening to dominate, exploit and result in the de-tribalisation of the Kondhs. Mojumdar observes,

...the establishment of marts and fairs in tribal tracts and the gradual replacement of the traditional subsistence economy with market economy brought into tribal tracts a stream of non-tribal people who had little in common with the local people. A conflict of interest between the local people and the immigrants lay in the very logic of circumstances. The new man made the most of the British administration, acting often as collaborators of the official functionaries to exploit the local people...The aboriginals sank into sullen acquiescence--a development which the British officers, especially the local ones, sincerely deplored, especially because they could do practically nothing to stem the process.<sup>31</sup>

B K Behera's study in the 1990s found, "It is heart rending to note that...small business class people and contractors who infiltrate into the

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<sup>30</sup> By 1872 Dalton wrote about the trade of the distillers called Sundis, 'a good deal of the trade of the country is in their hands, and some of them have accumulated considerable wealth.' *Descriptive Ethnology*, p. 299.

<sup>31</sup> Mojumdar, K. *Changing Tribal Life*, p. 139.

area...exploit the innocent Kondhs unabated. Presently, these outside infiltrators in collusion with the local officials and the Pana middlemen indulge in anti-Kondh and anti-social activities."<sup>32</sup> Centuries ago when they had adopted the paddy cultivation of the Hindus they had rejected the Hindu rituals associated with it and maintained their cultural distinction.<sup>33</sup> They had maintained their isolation from non-tribals and any contact was mainly through the Pans of the community. But Kondh seclusion began to break rapidly after the British opened up the country and the Oriya migrants poured in. A timeless tribal-non tribal controlled interaction process gave way to a rapid and active Oriyanisation and Hinduisation process. Missionaries observed the trend as "they (Kondhs) had reached a cross-road...they had reached the point where they would either become Hindus or they would become Christians."<sup>34</sup>

The decisive political change of the mid century, the Indian independence from the British rule in 1947 and the general elections to the new Orissa Assembly in 1951, were overwhelming political events affecting the Kondh hills. The election campaigns brought political activities right to the hills seeking Kondh votes. Boal captures the Kondh bewilderment at this new development of a democratic process.

One very intelligent but illiterate young Kond...could not set this new thing (political parties and election process) alongside his traditional view of justice and order, where either trial by ordeal or the elder's deliberations clearly settled matters beyond all doubt or dispute. He asked with a real desire to know: 'How do you tell which is the one speaking the truth and which are the deceivers.' That was an unanswerable question for such Konds as did cast their vote on that first occasion--after which life continued for them in exactly the same way as for thousands who disregarded the whole situation."<sup>35</sup>

Now the British rule was gone and power was being transferred to the hands of the new Oriya rulers whom the Kondhs deeply suspected. Through the new political change the Oriyas assumed all power. The new Orissa and national government brought direct administration to the hills and greater interference in Kondh affairs than the British or the pre-British Ghumsur kings who 'ruled' either partially or nominally as suzerains. The Kondhs had already resented the bureaucratic state administration in the hands of the Oriya officials under the British:

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<sup>32</sup> Behera, B K. *Tribal: Culture, Modernisation and Development: A Study of Kondh Tribe*, New Delhi: Khama Publishers, 1992, p. 210.

<sup>33</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Konds*, p. 220.

<sup>34</sup> Personal Interview with Rev Henry.

<sup>35</sup> Boal, Barbara. *The Konds*, p. 187. Parenthesis mine.

now power was coming into the hands of these Oriyas. This emerging political change was part of the background of Kondh religious change.

The new Christian ideologies, the awareness and access to information brought by Christian education and the gospel helped the Christian Pan community to counteract exploitation and assert a new identity. The converted Pans were demonstrating more assertiveness and confidence in dealing with the challenges of modernity and the new democratic process. Christianity offered them an organised alternative support system, knowledge and skills and with it social and economic empowerment. The Pans, who had an inferior status and role in the Kui community, were now asserting a new identity and allegiance and this was challenging to the Kondhs.

#### D. The Factor of Kondh-Pan Relation and Communication

It is necessary to see the nature and dynamics of the Kondh-Pan social relation and the Pan role in conversion. Interview questions along specified Kondh-Pan or tribal-caste lines are sensitive and Christians avoid open mention of 'Pan' or 'Kondh' (or Pana or Kandha) as identity terms.<sup>36</sup> However, I did insist during my personal interviewing that they tell me if they identified as Pan or Kondh.

The tribal Kondhs and the non-tribal Pans, speak one Kui language and living close to each other for many centuries give an impression of one community.<sup>37</sup> The Pans adopted both the language and religion of the Kondhs, so their apparent unity extends to major areas of practice and beliefs. Unlike the Pans elsewhere, the Kui Pans have neither temples nor idols and follow Kondh rituals. So outwardly, in day-to-day customs Pans and Kondh are similar; the Pans live as the Kondhs do.

However, the Kondhs considered the Pans inferior and there are social separations, inter-dining and inter-marriage are avoided. While some Pans have taken Kondh women as wives the opposite is rare. Assuming an inferior role Pans did such work as village messengers, scavengers, tanners, musicians and ritual mourners at Kondh ceremonies and many worked as field labourers for Kondh land

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<sup>36</sup> It must be mentioned that today's Christian community, comprising both Pans and Kondhs, is not eager to highlight the Kondh-Pan or tribal-caste ethnic differences. It remains subterranean. The terms Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste or commonly ST and SC are used by the young ones.

<sup>37</sup> Nothing is known for certain about the origin of Pan-Kondh relationship which is regarded as pre-historic. Bailey did not distinguish these as Pans or Doms but called them Oriyas. *Caste and Economic Frontier...* pp. 15-32. Boal observed, "Wherever aboriginal tribes dwell in the Orissa highlands and elsewhere in Middle India, there a little group of Pans are to be found at one end of most villages." *The Kondhs*, p. 2.



owners. Earlier they used to procure human victims for sacrifice and weave clothes for the Kondhs. As Kondhs preferred contact with the outsiders through the Pans only, they acted as commercial middlemen and moneylenders. Boal observed that "until the 1960s (they) have managed the whole commerce of the hills" dealing with the main Kondh product of turmeric and other forest produces. Many Pans and Oriyas started buying Kondh lands.

However, the Kondh-Pan inter-relation was more complex than it seemed. There was an ambivalence in the mutuality and inter-dependence. In outsiders' view, the Pans are clever, the Kondhs are simple, honest and docile, though ferocious if provoked and have been brave warriors in the past. But the Pan shrewdness did not threaten the Kondhs in the past, who felt in control of and were the master of their community. The Pans served as classic intermediaries, controlling the news and information, filtering and interpreting it for the Kondhs. Kondhs were always suspicious of Oriyas but they trusted the Pans and treated them as insiders. Pans lived at the margins of Kondh habitation and society but unlike plains outcastes, they enjoyed a unique degree of integration and participation. This relationship and social position formed the basis of their role as Christian message-bearers, witnesses and catalysts that impacted on the later Kondh conversions.

The Pan conversions to Christianity which took place initially upset the balance in Kondh-Pan relationship. Christianity altered the status of the Pan Christians and gave them a new identity as an emerging elite of teachers, pastors, evangelists, nurses, some becoming doctors or bank and government employees. The Mission's emancipation of the Pans effectively placed them ahead of the Kondhs and empowering them. Mojumdar comments the "converts to Christianity, particularly, (showed) a spirit of assertiveness against authority and reluctance to meekly suffer exploitation" and further observed "the trend of moral elevation among the Christians."<sup>38</sup> The Pan literates were better equipped to grasp the prevailing new political situation. They were fitting into modern changes and securing professional positions in offices, schools and health services.<sup>39</sup> This progress, new status and a degree of Oriyanization of these "lesser" members of the community could not escape the notice of the Kondhs, for it exposed Kondh vulnerability. Pans were becoming assertive and confident, demonstrating a new morality and attitude of

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<sup>38</sup> Mojumdar, K. *Changing Tribal life in British Orissa*, pp. 140-141.

<sup>39</sup> See Bailey, F G. *Tribes, Caste and Nation: A Study in Political Activity and Political Change in Highland Orissa*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960.

Christian love, care, fellowship and unity in line with their changed status and identity.

On the Mission front, the Pan Christians had begun to assume power, with some control of and responsibilities for institutions. In 1954 Jagannath Naik, a Pan layman and schoolteacher, was elected president of the Kond Hills District Church Union, a position previously held by the missionaries. More and more leadership positions in church, school and hospital were being transferred to them and a phasing out of missionaries had begun. The Kondhs using the school or hospital services had to deal with its Pan staff, from doctors down to all classes of workers. The hospital service and western medicine plus the transformed role and professional status of the Pans were all facts associated with Christianity with which the Kondhs had to come to grips with.

### E. The Kondhs as Agents of Conversion

The converts were incorporated into the missionary enterprise from the beginning and made evangelists, pastors or teachers. The missionaries not only knew the Kui were necessary as message-bearers in getting the gospel message across, but the missionaries were also practically dependent on the local people's help. From the beginning they were dependent on the 'natives' help as coolies, camp attendants, informants, pundits or assistants, for local knowledge, language, geography, custom, climate and so on. Some Mission-literate Kui boys and promising converts helped as gospel translators and as intermediaries between the Mission and the community. The missionary knowledge of the tribal, their language, custom and religion and the Kui knowledge and understanding of Christianity, and their action in conversion were the result of a dialogical process: Christopher Bayly has stressed that the colonial knowledge of India—ethnographic, cultural or historical—was the product of a dialogical process in which communication has played a critically important role.<sup>40</sup>

In the conversion movement the people commonly heard the gospel from their fellow Kui and it is they who held the key to the communication of the gospel. The Kui communicators were in the forefront of ministry and mission and they outnumbered the missionaries. Missionaries helped in administrative and institutional support but for the evangelisation and the diffusion of the gospel they depended

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<sup>40</sup> See Bayly, C A. *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

heavily on the Kui pastors and evangelists who knew their people's mind, real needs and aspirations. It was the Kui converts' skill, participation and active leadership which achieved the results in conversion, their enthusiasm, witness and action that drove the movement. News and events of conversions near or around was having an infectious effect.

In the dynamics of power relationship between the tribal Kondh and the minority Pan of the same Kui community, and between the Kui and the dominant Oriya, conversion was often an instrument in the hands of the convert to maintain the balance and resist dominance. In conversion the Kondhs acted intentionally to rearrange their social and sacred relationships. They actively incorporated elements of Christian practice to replace their own, and sought the help of the pastor only for formal initiation into the Christian fold through baptism. They were actively conscious in the conversion process which *they* initiated, selected and decided how far and how much they accept the change.

In the conversion movement, the member(s) of one family, relative, clan or community influenced or persuaded others to become Christian. Through the ties of 'bira-toru-rai' or kinship-relation network the conversions spread faster. The steps in conversion would include first a family or group of families discussing together and deciding to become Christian. More often they would dispose of their spirit objects first, objects now disfavoured or considered powerless. Sometimes that was done to show or prove to the Pastor their preparedness or sincerity to convert. Then they approached a Pastor or Christian leader in a nearby Christian village and asked to be taught about Christianity and receive baptism. The escalations in conversions, mainly in the 1960s and 70s in the in post-independence and post-missionary era, was an indigenous conversion movement initiated and led by the converts themselves.

To some extent the converts were subject to the power and forces of contemporary changes but they were also able to resist, negotiate, innovate and re-align relationship within the given social norms. To some extent their action in conversion was in reaction to the political changes affecting them as the community was encountering radical changes. The steadily declining tribal economy due to forest alienation, loss of land and increasing control by Oriya traders and distillers, physical sickness, high mortality, rising Pan fortunes through Christianisation and education, plus an internal disenchantment with the traditional sacrificial rituals, were all adversely affecting the community and also its social balance.

I have chosen to understand their conversions from their point of view, what they have to say about their conversions, the causes and motivations. They are the primary source and their testimonies inform an understanding which gives primacy to the converts' perspective in understanding the conversion movement. The oral narratives of the converts and their life stories are the source and basis of this perspective and understanding. The following reasons are summarised from these narratives from my interviews with them.

### 1. 'I have done a lot of sacrifices...I was fed up...' <sup>41</sup>

An internal and growing disenchantment with their traditional and costly sacrifices was one of the main reasons to look for an alternative in Christianity. Earlier sacrifices were offered as required or demanded by the priests or wished for by the sacrificer(s). They were honoured as sacred duty and regarded as essential. Sacrifices were at the core of the Kondh belief system, offered for both positive and negative reasons: to ensure a healthy crop, harvest, general fertility and wellbeing of the living and the dead and also to ward off ill-will of humans (evil eye, sorcery, bad omen etc), or against fever, other sicknesses, hostile spirits and epidemics. The human sacrifice of earlier times was the supreme one, offered to the *Dharni Penu* (the Earth goddess) to ensure the cosmic well being, fertility, and not least, a good colour for the turmeric, their main cash crop. Meria was substituted with a buffalo, though the cost in terms of money was not much less. In sacrifice, the livestock properties, their most costly possessions, had to be given over to the priests or shared with relatives through sacrificial meals which were frequent and included various items: from eggs, chickens, goats, pigs to a buffalo. Sacrifices went on in a calendrical cycle round the year and also at need. <sup>42</sup>

But with the external world closing in on them day by day, their contemporary situation and worldview were changing radically. Breaches were appearing in the boundaries of traditional beliefs through modern and Christian influences and the new rationality. These influences were encouraging them to skip or neglect the expensive requirement like the sacrifices when convenient and with that the hold of the traditional religion was undermined. The sacred and honoured duties were beginning to be regarded as burdensome and even invalid. The following

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<sup>41</sup> Interview # 21.

<sup>42</sup> See Boal, Barbara. *Man, the Gods and Search for Cosmic Wellbeing*. Bhubaneswar: NISWAS, 1999.

two narratives of my interview participants attest to these reasons and are testimony to their personal interest in conversion.

*(Why did you become Christian?)* Mainly because we were no longer able to make all these sacrifices, so we became Christian. The Popkas (Pastors) came to our village and told us, “you have been sacrificing all the time but any benefit? You become Christian. Your money is being wasted. We realised, yes, we are dying by doing sacrifices, though some are surviving. Much of our money is being wasted and our life is also wasted (in death)...Earlier they had fear of the jungle devta. Now no such fear. *(Were not your father and grand-father clearing jungle all the time?)* Yes, but they had the fear of the jungle, that some ghosts are living there. Once when our fathers were alive we brothers had gone with them to clear a patch of jungle land. There one of our brothers got a severe pain in his back. So our fathers told us, no, stop going any further. This is due to a *devta* living here. I remember that. Now we know no such spirits. The Jaani actually has no power.”<sup>43</sup>

*(How did you come to know about the Christians or Christian dharma?)* Sir, living in this jungle village I could not survive with all these sacrifices. These sacrifices were becoming very costly to us. *(How many sacrifices a year?)* For everything and all sickness small or serious. Now a days there are doctors but before there was no such facility. We could not go to any doctor. We did not know these sicknesses or diseases as we know them now. Our Jaani was eating our chickens; he was cheating and eating up our chickens, and our goats and pigs. That's why I became Christian. *(How much you had to spend on sacrifices?)* Well about thousand (Rupees) or so per year... (thinks then says), it would be more than that. Now whatever we spend for the doctor is for our actual sickness and cure. Now after becoming Christian no expenses of sacrifice. *(But who told you about Christian religion?)*. Well no one told me, I myself found out. I found out about Christians and became Christian. *(Well, from whom?)*. No, not like that, others here were already Christian. They knew that by sacrifice you could not help the fever go. We came to know from them that sacrifices are not helping in healing fever. So knowing that I became a Christian...*(So seeing others you followed them?)*. Yes, yes.<sup>44</sup>

These above responses represent the general dissatisfaction with the ritual requirement of sacrifices and emphasise that their reason for conversion was primarily because of the burden of these endless sacrifices. Personal motive and interest determined the action and decision. It was “Mainly because I could not sacrifice any longer”. The person in the second narrative establishes this point clearly when he insisted that “I myself found out. I found out about Christians and became a Christian.” Similarly another (whom I quote in more detail below) confirms the

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<sup>43</sup> Interview # 36.

<sup>44</sup> Interview # 22.



same point that he went down to his relative (already a Christian) and sought his help for him and his family to become Christian,

Rangappa used to visit us... he always told us 'if you continue to offer sacrifices you will only incur a lot of loss and at the end you will also die'. So I listened to Rangappa. Once I went to him, he was at Pajikia at that time. I asked him to tell me more. (*Who was he?*) He is our uncle, our mother's brother. We stopped all sacrifices and we got baptised.<sup>45</sup>

When Rangappa visited them and told these relatives to convert they did not do so at once. They had to think it over, observe him or other Christians, take their time and be fully convinced that Christianity was good for them or not. But at the same time the conversion of a close relative also was a convincing example to influence and persuade. The ritual sacrifices for sickness were a major drain as sickness was not only frequent but also unpredictable and made them more vulnerable to the Jaani's demand. As illnesses were frequent and mortalities were high, it is not surprising to see the intensity and involvement in sacrifices centred on adversities believed to be attacks from the unseen world. Ritual healing involved offering and spending on liquor, rice, fowls and other livestock, bigger and costlier.

I have quoted here four narratives from four persons, all male, Kondh and first generation converts. They are in the age range of 45 to 65 years. Sometime during the 1960s or 70s they converted to Christianity and do not remember the date or year. They come from the villages of Maliguda (the first two), Pakri and Gajinaju respectively, which are Kondh concentrated areas beyond Baliguda town. Their narratives encompass the whole situation and the incidents surrounding their conversions and do not make any clear distinctions between religious and non-religious or material, social or economic aspects of their life.

Rangappa used to visit us...and he always told us, 'if you continue to offer sacrifices you will only incur a lot of loss and at the end you will also die... (*How much you used to spend on sacrifices?*). When this child's mother was sick I have spent nearly thousand Rupees. Today it could have cost me two to three thousand. I have done a lot of sacrifices of goats, pigs and chicken even eggs. I was fed up with all that. So I listened to Rangappa. I went to him, he was at Pajikia at that time. I asked him to tell me more. (*Who was he?*) He is our uncle, our mother's brother. We stopped all sacrifices and we got baptised. We are the first Christians of this village. And seeing us the others in the village also became Christian, almost all. They asked us why you became Christian. We said, 'If you

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<sup>45</sup> Interview # 21.

become Christian your money will not be wasted. In stead of spending on the priest, giving him liquor, chicken and goat we can go to the hospital and we can live. All these we told our people. (*How many families?*) Fifty families. In a month all became Christian following us.<sup>46</sup>

3. We thought why should we spend money in puja unnecessarily and still we are dying. So we became willing to accept this *dharma*...why should not we accept *dharma*? Why should we spend on sacrifice? Earlier parents did sacrifice in ignorance but now we know the *Prabhu* why should we do puja?...And even then the fever and sickness never left us. That's why we left sacrifice. (*How often did you sacrifice?*) Once a year. (*So it was not so expensive*) No, why not? And even then it was of no use. You spend money but sickness doesn't go. (*Pastor told you to be Christian and you agreed?*) Yes. (*Did you ever read the Bible?*) No, I never read the Bible. Even though I did not read people read it to us. We know they (can) read the Bible and they tell us. When people read it to us we come to know what it says. This is dharma, this one is Lord...(Do you go to Church on Sundays?) Yes, we go to Church. (*Do you pray?*) Yes, we pray. Not at home, in the church. The Lord is in the Church. We believe the Lord is in the church. (*What change you are experiencing now after you have become Christian?*) What change sir, we are the same people, but we are better now, there is food to eat, children are fine, no sickness. Now we go to the hospital. Getting healed and loving the Lord...<sup>47</sup>

## 2. Economic Relief and Gain

Related to the above reason, conversion ensured economic relief from rituals depleting the livestock. Much of the money could now be saved which was spent on multiple sacrifices involving precious livestock, a major wealth of the poor. This economic implication was a strong attraction for the vast majority of poor. Endless, unavoidable and inevitable requirements of sacrifices of the precious livestock through out the year had made a big dent on their economy. Frequently offered sacrifices were a substantial financial burden involving a substantial loss. The new money economy of the migrants had already weakened the barter economy of the Kondh and the new consumer culture had added more burdens.

Similarly those who had to give up liquor testify that it freed them not only from addiction but also financial ruin. One major cause for many Kondhs' losing their rice growing lands to the clever Pans and Sundis (Oriya distillers) was Kondh addiction to distilled liquors. The Mission's insistence on abstaining from liquor deterred some from converting and caused others to retract. One convert in

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<sup>46</sup> Interview # 21.

<sup>47</sup> Interview # 20.

Daringbadi areas told clearly that he was a Baptist before but now gone over to the Roman Catholic Church because they allow drinking in a certain small quantity, where as the Baptists did not. Overall, conversion promised cost-cutting in sacrifice, priests' services and from addictions. Converts claim that Christian faith has now resulted in their good health, better dress, less financial worries and saving or economic gain.

### 3. The Power of the Priest Undermined

The Kondh priest was no match for western medicine. The priestly power in crisis situations like life threatening sickness was seriously undermined by the services of the hospital staff, western medicine and treatment. The facts about physical sickness learned and confirmed through the use and experience of hospital medicine was an alternative knowledge which undermined the priests' traditional knowledge and expertise gained over for centuries. The major blow was when some of the priests themselves took to treatment in the hospital or left their own profession after converting to Christianity: confidence in the *Jaani* was lost.

Now the Pan Christians who had ceased to engage the Kui priest and used instead the help of the pastor and moreover used doctor's medicine and treatment posed a challenge to the Kondhs. Christian conversion emboldened them against the power of the priest or diviner who was believed and feared to have power to wreck a field of standing crop or cast a bad spell on the enemy. Conversion testimonies state that "the *Jaani* has no power", "the *Jaani* was cheating and eating our chickens" and "now we know we are spending for actual sickness" etc.

The following narrative highlights the falling number and influence of the priests in some areas.

Our *Jaani* was eating our chickens; he was cheating and eating up our chickens, and our goats and pigs. That's why I became Christian.<sup>48</sup>

We are the first family in our village to be converted. All others remained in Kondh religion but they were our relatives. They told us not to have any relation with them...For the next one year we were the only Christian family. Then Tunda Degal, the priest, became Christian because the Kondhs challenged and ridiculed him saying how Rajendra family could throw away the *Hadibai Penu* from his house and nothing happened. So you are a false priest. The Christian god seems stronger and no spirit could harm him. So the next person was Tunda to become Christian. When Tunda became Christian

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<sup>48</sup> Interview # 22.

and left his occupation there was no one else as he was the only priest who performed spirit rites for both the Pans and Kondhs. Now without a priest gradually more and more families became Christian. Today there are only very few who are not Christian in my village.<sup>49</sup>

This suggests pressure and challenge to Kui priests during the conversion movement. Some also indicated the dearth of priests was causing problem. The harvested rice and lentil could only be consumed after proper rites performed by the priest for each house hold. But an acute shortage of priests began to be felt as number of converts began to rise among the Kondhs, including some from among the priests, and this peculiar crisis also further accelerated the conversions.

I was in a crisis situation because there was shortage of priests in this area (Dokebadi of Daringbadi)...Before the new rice and new Kandula (lentil grown mainly in the Kondh hills) is cooked *Jaani* had to perform certain rites and we used to be in fasting that day until it takes place. But when the *Jaani* did not turn up it was painful to remain in indefinite fast. It happened repeatedly. Once I was going to a village in search of a *Jaani*, on my way I met two of my relatives of another village who had become Christians. They advised me not to bother about the *Jaani*. They said you believe in Jesus. I came back home and gave it a try and we ate without puja. Nothing happened to us. I called Pastor Braja Pradhan from Rakenbadi to come and make me Christian and throw away all my objects. (What objects?). They are Dharni. (like?) One round stone, one long stone, some brass animals, axe etc, he threw away. I became Christian in 1962.<sup>50</sup>

With the abolition of Meria, its divine priest, *Jaani*, strictly a male and celibate, had faced redundancy as the more common priest the *Kuta gatanju / gataka* (male and female respectively and also called *Jaani* in some places) could perform most sacrifices and rituals. Christian conversion further affected the priest's role and influence. In some areas or villages where most people converted to Christianity the priests lost their clients. Where the priests became Christian it reduced their number accordingly. In places where the people depended on the services of those priests, they were badly affected by the shortage.

In the egalitarian Kondh society, the *Jaani* or *Kuta gatanju/gataka* had the power to demand sacrifice at will from the people or the village for their well being, though he was not regarded an oppressive figure and unlike the Brahmin's hierarchical superiority in Hindu society, the Kondh priest was on the same level.

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<sup>49</sup> Interview. # 16.

<sup>50</sup> Interview # 12.

But Christian awareness undermined his/her power and prerogative and consequent redundancy. The hospital service and better awareness about health and sickness contributed further to this crisis. Today the converts repudiate the priests as manipulative and powerless and so do the modern minded Kondhs, perhaps influenced by the “all or nothing” view of missionaries. Yet these traditional priests had been a vital source of tribal medicinal knowledge and therapy, and their ancient wisdom is being lost due to apathy and rejection of this knowledge.

#### 4. “Now we have this *Dharma*”: Inherent Attraction of Christianity

While scholars emphasise the outward changes in conversion, the converts insist on the inward process of their conversion. It is easier to notice the outward religious or social change while it is much more difficult to uncover the inward change. True, they are clear about the financial savings they now make as they no longer have to sacrifice their livestock and have given up liquor and, even tobacco. However, conversion also meant a new *dharma* and accepting the new Jesus god, as the *Prabhu* (Lord) and it was a matter of faith. The words used here, ‘devta’, ‘dharma’, ‘puja’ and ‘Prabhu’ are all Oriya and Hindu religious terms. Dharma, the Hindu principle of life, also a term for ‘religion’ is now used by the Kondhs to describe faith and belief in Christianity. ‘Dharma’ is a higher level word than that used for the Kui way. Being Christian for them is a recognised religion.

Kondh converts do make theological connections and find parallels with Christian or Biblical stories with their own stories or traditions, as do other tribal converts. Many tribal stories of India resemble, in meaning, the stories of the Judeo-Christian tradition or of the Bible. For example the Northeast India’s Naga and Mizo tribal myths have resemblance to the Garden of Eden and the Fall stories. Similarly Central India’s Santal myths find many parallels like the Twelve tribe confederation of Israel, the Exodus and others Israelite stories.<sup>51</sup> I was told by a retired Pan teacher of the Biblical parallels in Kui religion like the human, animal or blood sacrifices, the *Bura Penu* (Great God or the God of light in Macpherson), the Creation/Delusion myths and making booths in the field as a festival (cf. Lev 23:33-44, Num 29: 12-40), of the Kondhs. Although human sacrifice is a taboo topic today and is not discussed much openly, Christian pastors made connections to the death of Christ to build the bridge to the Kondh concept of blood sacrifice: Christ’s death is explained

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<sup>51</sup> See Hembrom, T. *The Santals: Anthropological-Theological Reflections on Santal and Biblical Creation Traditions*. New Delhi: Punthi Pustak, 1996.



and emphasised as the supreme and final act of sacrifice therefore the Kondhs need not do any more blood sacrifice.

One non-literate Kondh in Jakesi village, comparatively remote, explained that besides shaking off the burden of puja or the priest's demands, to him conversion also meant "if you know the Lord everything will be fine. Jesus died in this world for us, and he gave his blood; because we don't know about that we were worshipping the *dongra* (the hill), things, stones and trees."<sup>52</sup> His articulation of his faith was intellectual and based on a new *faith* and more than socio-economic or political bargains. The missionaries certainly wanted spiritual conversion of the people. They insisted on testing the converts' knowledge on the basic doctrines of Christianity before giving them baptism. In spite of the difficulty in keeping pace with the rapid conversion and large numbers of enquiries the required test and examination of each candidate for baptism was done.

The converts like to describe their conversion as a new dharma, as a revival of faith. One of the strong reasons given for conversion was healing by prayer and the ability to cast out evil power and ward off dangers posed by hostile spirits.

"We were all Hindus here. Then his son became ill. (*whose son?*). Tirunga's son Donda. He could not be healed. So his father went to Pakri to call the Popka to find out if he could help. And the Popka came. And the child became well. By seeing that his family and then after that gradually all village became Christian. Then our Sarpanch's son also became ill. He said I will also call the Popka to pray for my son. He went and called the Popka. He came and prayed, and the son also became well. And he became Christian. (*Did the Popka give medicine?*). No, the Popka prayed and the child was healed."<sup>53</sup>

...The same man who came to attack us his own daughter fell sick and she died in three days time. (That man was Hari Mallik). After some days he himself became sick. He could not ask my uncle's help who used to treat sickness by his spells (mantra). Because he had become a Christian now. He even did not go to other priests. He came to our house and told my uncle "brother, we also want to become Christian."...I remember going to Hari mallik's house for a time of Church service and prayer. After the service his long hair was cut. All dharni objects were removed by singing song and clapping. All village came to see what was happening. All those objects were brought to one place, smashed then burnt down.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Interview # 23.

<sup>53</sup> Interview # 23.

<sup>54</sup> Interview # 26.

The woman leader of the Diocese claimed in the interview that "one of the main causes of the movement was the healing ministry of the Pastors. All pastors were involved in healing ministry and many were carrying simple medicines from the hospital. They treated physical illness and also mental illness. The mental illnesses included spirit possession, trouble by bad spirit, ghost appearing in houses were some of the common problems, which they encountered and cast out demons. They were very deeply engaged in power encounter."<sup>55</sup>

## 5. The Pan Role in Kondh Conversions

The Pan Christians were in the fore front of evangelisation. By the late 1950s, they were leading the Church organisation and the new elite, as teachers and other professionals, in the Mission and in government. The Kondhs approached these Pan Christian leaders for Christian instruction and received baptism from them. And as said earlier the Pans used to be village messengers, running errands for Kondh headmen and delivered council notices to all in the village. Now they gave the Christian message to the Kondhs.

The Pans knew and understood the Kondh mind, emotions, aspirations, and also apprehensions and predicament better than any others. Not only they were the nearest neighbours but Pans had also taken up the Kondh culture, language, religion or practices. The commonality in these core areas of life plus a common history of centuries placed them in a position of advantage in their role as evangelists or Christian workers among the Kondhs. The Pans could make contact and communicate intimately with the Kondhs. Given the deep distrust the Kondhs had for outsiders and non tribals, the Pans enjoyed a position as almost insider. Their proximity contributed to reaching out to Kondhs in evangelisation in their inaccessible mountain terrain. The Kondhs, for their part, could observe the change in their neighbour Pan Christians lives, their new sense of identity and confidence and perhaps more importantly, their growing independence from the Kondhs for whom they were doing some specified jobs and duties and from whom they were now buying up lands.

But then why did the Kondhs not resist or oppose conversion, or eject the Pan? This question brings us to a fact at the other side of their relationship and commonality, the ethnic and social distance between them. The Pans were not tribals, and occupied a lower place by doing menial jobs and served the Kondhs in one way

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<sup>55</sup> Interview # 41

or other. Conversion to Christianity for Kondhs therefore meant a demeaning descent down in the social scale. At the conversion of some well-to-do Kondhs the opposition was intense because of this reason: Christianity was the religion of the Dalit Pans. A young Kondh Christian leader of the Diocese described his own father's attitude and active opposition in the initial days to his sister who had become Christian.

My father did not allow them (his sister and her husband) into his house. His idea was if you have become Christian you are reduced to the low caste Pan. You become like a sweeper. By that he had meant Dulabh's conversion, he was a Pan and the first Christian in this area...So my father did not allow his own sister and brother-in-law into the house. So my *pisi* (aunt) cried. She said, 'as your elder sister I had brought you up when our father and mother died. Now you are denying me entrance to your house'. Even then my father was adamant saying you have become a sweeper. You can not enter this house. *Pisi* herself told me about this story many times.<sup>56</sup>

The conversion of the Pans therefore initially became a deterrence to Kondhs for the church had a low image: it was an institution for those who had neither caste or tribal roots.

In post-independent Orissa the Pans showed more preparedness and confidence. Their new affiliation, alternate organisation, their leadership position, and visible change in economic and political status, were all changing the traditional equation in social ranking between these two communities. The Church Union was already under the leadership of the Pans. They, and only they, stood up to the new situation which independent India was throwing up, with Oriyas taking the reins of power. With the phasing out of the missionaries they were poised to take control of the major institutions of Church, schools, hostels and hospital in the mission. The few Kondhs who had already joined the Pans in conversion stood to gain from their new affiliation and relation in this change. The Christian Pans were now the new elite, part of an organised community with power and control of some of the key institutions in the hills. And the Kondhs were already dependent on some of these institutions. The time was ripe for the Kondhs to come out of hesitation or opposition to share this higher status. In the changed reality the Kondhs did not hesitate to aspire to be like the hitherto despised Christian Pans. This started slowly but quickly gained rapid momentum.

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<sup>56</sup> Interview # 44.

## 6. An Indigenous Conversion Movement

The Kondh conversions came at a time of their own choosing. They took their own time and as long as Christianity was not promising to them and considered not relevant they did not take any interest. But theirs is a dynamic and pragmatic culture. All customs and rituals had immediate and present significance including the ancestors who were either invisibly present or called to be present when needed. Boal discovered a doll inscribed 'made in Japan' as part of the sacred objects along with the traditional red cloth, silver coin and liquor pot, in one of the households. Christian songs and hymns or books and Bible were also found in use or possession across some non Christian Kondh houses or persons.

The Pans showed the benefits of Christianity before the Kondhs. And Kondh villages began to take notice of these changes. In some cases the initiative came through the wives. Christian Kondh girls who got married in distant villages and into non Christian families brought their Christian influence into their husband's family. Some of this included prayer in times of sickness, keeping a Bible, some ignoring of traditional rituals or behavioural changes. Some interview narratives pointed out the role of Christian wives in some initial conversions.

It was my wife who made me Christian. She constantly put pressure on me to become Christian. Even just before our marriage she said if we become the people of the Lord it would be for our good. After my marriage I became Christian.<sup>57</sup>

Three people had first become Christian in this village. They all had married Christian wives from Boudungia, a Christian village. They came to know (about Christianity) from Boudungia and also their wives were responsible in converting them as Christians.<sup>58</sup>

The pattern of Christian influence from the family members was common. Conversions spread through family and marriage relations. For the large numbers of Kondhs, they heard the Gospel from their fellow Kondhs, through relatives and kinship-relationship and contact. Once become Christian they influenced their kin's people to join them. And in other cases where a majority of a household became Christian the minority simply could not afford to remain in aloofness and not belonging to the group, so they joined them eventually. There were initial tensions between the converted and unconverted groups. Some would resolve through the conversion of the remaining members and in some cases the converted have moved out to join Christians in a different village. The conversion of a family affected all its

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<sup>57</sup> Interview # 01.

<sup>58</sup> Interview # 06.

relatives in the village and when a group of families or a village converted it had bigger impact on its relatives. Kondhs lived in close relation to relatives and clan and the elders and village headman influenced the decision making. Life can not be imagined in unbelonging and what is good for the group or clan is accepted as good for individuals.

The conversion movement meant the ownership of the gospel. The impetus of the movement came from within the group. When the source of the gospel and its meaning was from within it was credible and acceptable. Kondhs began to build their own church houses, in fact it was taken up as one of the first affirmation of their organised stand in the new order. They also demanded visits or appointment of pastors in their churches. With the growth of churches among the Kondh there is some tension now between Kondh and Pan dominated churches over leadership and institutional issues.

## Conclusion

The Kondh conversions were part of a post-colonial assertion of tribal identity in the changing political and social situation. It was an indigenous movement in which the Kondhs were the agents of their own conversion and they initiated and led the movement. Christianity offered a well organised system and abetted in the preservation of Kondh tribal pride and identity under pressure from growing Oriyanisation and Hinduization. The Kondhs took their own decision and chose in favour of Christianity.

The Pans enjoyed a peculiar and advantageous position among the Kondhs as neighbours and to some extent as insiders who could contribute to influence Kondhs in changing times. Though initially they were a deterrent to the Kondh conversion but later their own social change and status became attractive to the Kondhs.

The conversions were also a genuine spiritual search, addressing the issues of a growing disillusionment with the Kondh priesthood challenged by the western modern influences, the efficacy of traditional Kondh duties and the blurring of traditional religious boundaries by the growing Hinduization and Christianisation of the hills' lives. Christianity also could become inherently attractive with its Christology as the core of its gospel which could be contextualised and substituted Kondh belief, known for a strong tradition and belief in the efficacy of the blood sacrifice.



## CONCLUSION

The research findings of this thesis show that the conversions among the Kui people took place as a result of Gospel communication. It was the pre-occupation of the mission and the Gospel was communicated in various modes. I have chosen and studied five major ones: the communicator (who was also the message), the spoken word, the written word, the educational and medical mission as Christian communication. I acknowledge there may be others apart from these which I have not examined. The persons who represented and communicated the message, the years of evangelism through the spoken and printed word and the mission of educational, social and humanitarian services, engaged the people intellectually and practically with the gospel message. In the Kondh hills mission it resulted in a conversion movement, which gained momentum only after most missionaries had left. These conversions involved the agency of the converts, the Kui converts being actual message-bearers of Christianity and decision-makers of their own conversion.

The untouchable Pans had converted first, for whom Christianity had given the message of equality and status. They became key players, primarily as evangelists in the later and larger conversions of the Kondhs. The Kondh response to conversion, which pushed the growth of the church to over four hundred in about two decades, began only from the late 1950s, in the post-independence and post-missionary period. The conversions among the Kui people—the Pans and the Kondhs—were an indigenous movement in which the converts were the agents. They took their own time and decision to convert; the initiative, the manner of change and the meaning of conversion was theirs.

This phenomenon counters a commonly-held view that such tribal and low caste conversions are achieved by missionaries—western or Indian outsiders—through ‘force’ or ‘inducements’ and that the tribals, being poor, ‘backward’ or non-literate, were passive recipients in conversion. Such interpretations of conversion fail to explain the cause and nature of post-missionary Kui conversions when the missionaries or their money, the missionary doctors or the material goods if any, were either non-existent or negligible. In fact, in the Kondh hills, every convert group built its own church and made regular contribution of cash and kind for support of the church organisation. The Mission even declined a suggestion of McGavran, the Church Growth missiologist, to help roof the church huts with free corrugated sheets, as a bad idea.

The thesis identifies five major modes of Christian communication of the Mission and the Kui church, which played a vital role in the transmission of Christian knowledge and gospel to the Kui. Evangelism was a priority with the Mission and the Church. The gospel message was communicated through the spoken word of preaching and sharing, and the written word of the translated and printed Bible and Christian literature. The Christian institutions, services and the persons whose life-style, if not always attitude, was a manifestation of their beliefs, all represented and communicated the Christian message, symbolically, visibly and in other ways. The five modes of communication examined were: the persons who represented the message; their spoken word of preaching and sharing; the printed Kui Bible and Christian literature; school/hostel education; and finally the health care or mercy mission based on Christian concern. These have been found to be potential instruments and channels which represented, transmitted, demonstrated and disseminated the message of the Christian gospel.

This study has demonstrated that the ultimate decision in conversion rested in the hands of the Kui people and it is the converts' agency that produced these conversions. The first baptism took place among some literate Pans in 1914, twenty three years after the regular missionary work began, in 1891, which suggests an initial indifference to the gospel. The Kondhs were the last to respond to conversion after over a century of mission initiative and only when Christianity was becoming increasingly visible through the local church, set up and run by the Pan converts. The Kondhs initiated and led the conversion movement, in which they sought Christian teaching and asked for baptism in large numbers. They chose to take on Christianity as and when they found it useful and did not abandon many old and daily customs that were at odds with missionary teaching, despite the fact that one challenge to their own system of ritual healing had been the Mission hospital treatment from 1939. They encountered Christianity intellectually through the years of Christian presence and engaged with its message communicated through multiple modes, some more effective than others. The converts heard or read the Christian story or saw the Christian change or experienced healing, care or welcome to the unwelcome before their conversion. Thus the final decision to convert was fully informed.

Chapter one, which sets out the method of research and describes Grounded Theory approach used in this research, emphasised that the qualitative data collected through personal and group interviews, such as the oral narratives and life stories of the converts, are a valid and a primary source of reality of an intimate matter such as

religious conversion: quantitative data would have achieved little. The personal testimonies of the first generation converts used as evidence reveal *their* motivation and the meaning of conversion for them. The missionary did have power, money and sometimes material goods. Yet they had these for a hundred years without effecting any Kondh conversion at all. The oral stories or the testimonies of the converts testify to the fact of a genuine and more satisfying spiritual search in conversion. The benefit and relevance of the Christian Gospel to the Kondh needs were gradually recognised and accepted, leading to conversion.

It is noted in chapter two that the message-bearer was also the message, as well as its source and medium. The people's first impression, and for some the main impression, of Christianity was the person or the 'flesh bringing the Word', in life-style, actions, attitudes and beliefs. In this regard, the unusual but nevertheless the first impression was conveyed by the presence and actions of the British East India Company officers from 1835, who professed a Christian faith, judged the Kui religion from their Christian perspectives, negotiated 'reforms' from their frame of beliefs and looked to missionary education to complete the 'civilizing' mission they had started. These EIC officers' involvement with the Kondhs is known mainly for political and military reasons alone, both in colonial records and Indian writings. But, in fact, many officers' thoughts and actions in the Meria negotiations, in acting against female infanticide, in the rescue and rehabilitation of victims, in starting schools, or in producing Christian texts for Kui to read in their own language were fundamentally and often explicitly Christian. This aspect of the officers' engagement with the Kui in their pre-modern and pre-missionary stage needs more attention and further research.

Many ex-Merias (none being Kondhs) rehabilitated in the Mission orphanages away from Kondh hills became Christian, but it remains unclear to what extent the impact of the EIC officers among the Kui people was explicitly Christian. There was an initial bloody war, followed by a protracted campaign against Meria with measures of tribal development and then a 'sudden change' in the Kui attitude to the British. The Kondh memory captured in their folk songs cites two prominent officers (*Kiamol* or Campbell and *Mokodola* or Macpherson), as bringers of 'wisdom', 'knowledge' and 'prosperity' to the Kui people.

The western missionary arrived late, regular mission work beginning only from 1891, when the Kondh hills' political administration had been mostly left to Indian assistants. The missionary was experienced as being more genuinely

interested in Kui people and was closer to them than these transient government personnel and the Oriya settlers doing business and interested in taking over Kui lands. The missionaries lived there continuously, preached and did service. They were exposed to the people in their strengths and vulnerabilities. Their efforts to learn the language and preach the love and peace of God were welcomed and many missionaries established deep relationships with the people. Missionary mortality, vulnerability and a life of separation from family members earned sympathy and admiration, and the modern initiatives and skills they introduced made some of them popular.

In general, the missionaries were welcomed and appreciated, although some were resented and disliked for their rigidity, elitism, discipline and the various policies they thought it necessary to impose. Cultural gaps, ignorance and differences also remained between the missionary personnel and the tribal Kui, between missionary living-standard and the average Kui life: differences in thinking and practices were stark. The distance was real. No conversions at all took place until the involvement of a gifted Indian evangelist, John Biswas. However, the image of the missionary as one concerned for the socially weak who preached equality and dignity was attractive to the marginal Pan minority. And they were the first to convert.

The most effective communicators in conversion, of course, were their own. Converted Christians who became leaders—as evangelist-pastors or school teachers—were crucial players in Christian communication. The initial local workers were the Pan church community. The personal participation of these converts as evangelists, pastors, teachers, women workers, youth workers, Sunday school teachers, medical staff and such other Church and Mission personnel widely influenced their fellow Pans and Kondhs. It was those converts, people of equal or inferior status, who could communicate to the heart and touch the imagination of their own people. The emerging new identity of the Christian Pans, their Christian practices, changing status, including dress, life-style and occupation, was unmissable and increasingly visible. These convert Christians gave life to the words of the gospel, preached or in print. They proved the key to the diffusion of the gospel or Christian message in the community.

Chapters three and four demonstrate that there were two direct methods of Christian communication. Firstly, the spoken word of preaching, teaching and, more commonly, through personal sharing. Secondly, through the written/printed Kui (some Oriya) of the Bible or Christian texts regularly produced and distributed. Often

the spoken word was complemented by the written tracts, books, gospel books or the *Puni Saja* (New Testament). Putting the Kui language into writing, and attracting Kui to school education and producing its books were done by Christians: the Kui written word was primarily Christian. For practicality the spoken word and in principle the written word was chosen for gospel communication. Both the spoken word and the written word were chosen for gospel communication, and both were effective in different degrees.

Word of mouth was the common, preferred and the major form of communication in the community, vital for effective relationship. Evangelism carried out personally by visiting, making contact and speaking to people in their own language, space and by their own people was effective communication in the Kui context. The convert-evangelists did most evangelism, personally travelling to villages, chatting, praying and preaching, and in the mother-tongue. Messages or ideas personally spoken, from known sources and from real visible and equal people were accepted as trustworthy; for they came, stayed, accepted hospitality and showed genuine empathy. Moreover, the 'Kui spoken word was power' with dynamism and effect: traditionally a spoken promise and agreement could secure a peace deal and even a land deed. In ritual performance the spoken words of invocation, incantation and supplication were powerful and efficacious. Christian prayer and Bible words read out from the Book were regarded as efficacious too, in healing sickness or exorcising spirit possession.

Most converts I interviewed testified that their encounter with Christianity was through the preaching, sermons, personal stories, conversations, counselling, Christian prayers or songs, of the evangelists, pastors, Christian relatives and neighbours. "Our *Popkas* (Kui pastors) told us sacrifices are useless", "you become Christian" and "we thought why should we sacrifice when our children are still dying?" These were the voices and reasoning from within the community, and influenced the Kui decision making process. Christian stories, personal Christian experiences and testimony to Christian change were shared and circulated with powerful effect. Such personal words of opinion, statements and testimonies laced with the hyperbole, metaphors, persuasion and examples common to Kui story tellers, were effective communication within the community for change and action.

Prayer of the pastors was believed to have power over sickness, as had the speech of the traditional ritual specialists, and to exorcise dangerous and vexing spirits. Exorcism of such spirits through Christian prayers was a major contributing



factor for conversion. Songs also played an important role in evangelism, and Christian songs were popular even among some Kuis who were not Christian. Christian stories were circulated faster and wider by word of mouth than the other means, and the personal spoken 'evangelism' was effective in putting across Christian ideas. When Christian words of prayer, words of the Bible and prayer for healing began to be used against sickness and dangers of the unseen, it was a shift from the Jaani's word, which was losing efficacy, to the Christian prayer and world view, the alternate and seemingly more effective system.

Chapter four noted the stress placed by the BMS on Christian communication through the written word. To them the written Scripture was the source of Truth and the written word was its cogent medium of communication. The emphasis on print was rather disproportionate compared to the level of literacy: so much of the mission efforts focused on Christian literature and the Bible. This was due to the Baptist mission's preference for the written Scripture, literature, and literacy work linked to it. However, the written word could communicate to an extent far wider than the single reader, as the few literates not only read for themselves but they also read for others to hear, a practice common in societies where literacy rates are low.

Writing gave a new identity to the Kui language and the Kui Bible was its new symbol, enabling it to stand equal to other written languages. Introduced by the British administration, the concept of the legitimacy, formality and permanency of the written word as against the oral word also entered into the culture and Kui estimation of value and honour. Missionaries provided everyday reading material in Kui, (some in Oriya as well) and most was Christian, the Kui New Testament, *Puni Saja*, being the main book. These had a considerable influence on the thoughts and imagination of new learners and listeners.

The written word also became a credible and authoritative medium. The converts' narratives referred to the Bible, saying "it is written in the Bible so we believe it." In other words 'what is written is true' became the new and acceptable norm. At another pragmatic level, there had been a powerful objectification of the Bible by the converts in their conversion process. The Bible, whether Kui or Oriya, was used as a god-object to replace the spirit-objects revered and honoured before. In the conversion movement many Bibles were bought and carefully placed in the house, besides being a prominent Christian symbol, it also filled a vacuum created by the disposal of the spirit-objects. A senior Christian leader's assertion

noted in this chapter is candid, “it has played a very useful and necessary role for the converts living in remote villages,” where the few evangelist/pastors could not reach on time to pray and dispose of the spirit-objects, the Bible was used to replace those and to identify or declare its possessor(s) as Christians.

Chapter five showed the communication role of the educational mission. This chapter showed that schools and hostels played both an educational and more narrowly a Christian role. School education not only developed literacy but beyond that, it was a potential instrument for cultural change. First of all the mission’s initiative in the Kui vernacular medium of education along with providing Kui primer and textbooks, attracted the Kui to school education: they had been indifferent to the Oriya medium schools of the government established so far.

Literacy equipped the Kui to encounter the Christian message in the printed pages of the Gospel or Christian books. The school primers of Millman contained Christian texts and introduced Christian contents to learners from an early age. The mission adult literacy classes enabled many more to read and they had mostly the Gospel and Christian books to read in their language. The mission education imparted Christian social ideals, morals and discipline, and also equality and human dignity of all irrespective of caste, gender and religion. Children in schools and Sunday schools read and taught Christian stories and some school children became Christian first and later influenced their parents to become Christian. The Christian school teachers were effective agents of a Christianisation process through the role of teacher-evangelists and teacher-pastors. The schools gave the church its educated leaders and also educated communicators, vital to its life and growth. It is important to note that conversions began among some literate Pans reading Christian books, and not among the non-literate masses. The first baptisms were of a family of a priest who were literates and the second of the family of a school teacher, baptised three months apart.

Education expanded the Kui horizon: it enabled the school educated to incorporate ideas and knowledge from across their traditional boundaries and worldviews, and it also challenged and weakened many of their own traditional beliefs and concepts. Education in such subjects as science, geography and history taught knowledge and concepts far beyond the traditional Kui world and such knowledge and information from outside breached their isolation and influenced their traditional beliefs. Even the non-literates were affected too by the Christian

stories or practices and behaviours brought to homes by school or hostel children of the family.

Education gave rise to a new class of professionals among the Christian Pans who took to education more enthusiastically than the reticent Kondhs. Pans could see the gain from education, helping them to rise from their social and economic conditions. Education and Christianity was empowering a few Pans who could find employment, enhance status and acquire sophistication and assertiveness. This was a visible lesson to the Kondhs, the majority and masters of the community. Eventually, in the new modernising environment, education brought dignity and status to both the Pan and Kondh, regarded as outcaste and primitive respectively, in the eyes of their plains neighbour.

However, mission education as an agent of Christianisation was limited as literacy was and has remained consistently low in the Kondh hills. The Mission too handed over its schools to the government by the 1940s, except the three in Gudripodi, due mainly to lack of funds and difficulty in supervision. The Mission opened its education to all, and not as an inducement for Christian development alone. Schools did not convert many; the majority of the schools' pupils were not Christian and never converted to Christianity.

It is noted in chapter six that the medical mission's Christian message was most visible, and powerfully demonstrated in the healing, care and nursing of the Mission hospital. Its mission was rooted in faith that it is God who heals while the doctors treat, and the hospital work was clearly a Christian ministry. The impressive mission hospital in the impoverished and deprived Kondh hills area symbolised Christian power of healing. Its institutional message was of hope in dreaded sickness and disease, and deliverance from pain and suffering. This message was closely linked to the credibility of the Christian gospel and Christianity itself. In traditional Kondh belief healing was linked to the power of the unseen spirits and therefore they understood in the same way the Christian prayers by the hospital staff and the testimony to God's healing claimed by them and many ex-patients. Life-saving healing, relief from pain and testimony to these experiences created faith in many.

Medical treatment and healing also starkly contrasted with the traditional treatment, and often proved successful in cases considered hopeless and terminal by traditional healers. The Kui converts today point out that the Jaani's rituals are "false" and his/her medicine is of no use. The Christian or modern Kui's trust in western medicine may be right especially for certain sicknesses and epidemics but

the 'miracle' of western medicine has undermined the local medicine that includes many age-old proven remedies easily available to all, and also caused damage to ancient knowledge and a healing system. The mission doctors too did not seem to have much interest in the local tribal medicinal knowledge either; all aspects of the local religion are equally rejected.

Chapter seven demonstrates the agency of the Kui converts. It shows them as the subjects of conversion, active and negotiating in change. The Gospel and testimonies of conversion were shared by the converts with fellow Kui and reasoned together in their common situation of struggles, predicaments and aspirations. The Gospel through the voice and life of their fellow Kui resonated and communicated to a sensitive people like the Kui. Both Pans and Kondhs took their time and made their own decision to convert. Conversions beginning from 1914 were confined mostly to the Pan minority. Only from the late 1950s the Kondhs converted but surpassed the Pans in numbers and pace of conversion. The Kui conversions were not mass-conversions at all. Individual adults from a family or families or of a village decided together and sought baptism, which occurred at a fast pace over two decades. The converts often disposed of their spirit-objects first then waited for Christian teaching and baptism for formal entry into the church. In this action, their meaning of conversion was different from that of the Mission, and their decision to convert was ahead of receiving official Christian teaching on faith, doctrine, baptism or personal salvation. The would-be converts normally decided to become Christian after listening to or watching a Christian member of the family, a relative, an evangelist or being influenced by another Christian encounter. They then asked for the pastor's help in baptism and joining the church.

The communication-conversion process involved intellectual and personal or group encounter with the Christian message, and a judgement or response in acceptance, rejection, indifference or observation from a distance. In this process the 'audience' or would-be converts were the final decision-maker in response to conversion, whether positive or otherwise. Therefore the converts' agency and decisions were fundamentally important and final determining factor in conversion. The fact that not all Pans or Kondhs converted even at the height of the conversion movement and that in some villages where most became Christian some others did not, further suggest that these conversions were neither manufactured nor ill-considered but were the results of an active and informed decision in conversion.

This decision was preceded and influenced by a long-drawn process of Christian communication and the response also involved consideration of its consequences.

The freedom and judgement of the converts are also evident in those who backslided or 'returned' to their former belief and practices. There were many instances where converts discovered the Church's prohibition or moral policies to be unreasonably strict and impossible to keep. Some converts in Daringbadi area said they changed over to the Roman Catholic Church because it permitted drinking as normal in a certain limited quantity. Converts have shown freedom to convert, not to convert, to revert, to change to other denominations or to convert to Hinduism, which many Kui have done. In conversion and in reversion they have demonstrated their prerogative, and that the choice and final decision was in their hands.

These Kui conversions question and refute the general perception that missionary power or money achieved tribal conversions, and that the tribals were passive and hapless victims of a proselytising process imposed on them. The Kui conversions are better explained as indigenous and intelligent initiatives towards claiming a new social and religious identity in Christianity, following a way of life communicated through converted fellow Kui, their practices, the Church and its institutions, as understood by them.

Christian communication was successful by the result of the response to conversion; however, there were failures as well. Missionary communication was largely unidirectional, as they had only to give and not much to receive or take-in. The barrier to communication was a lack of commonness too—missionary housing, children's schooling, marriages, holidaying and much of everyday living were outside the social purview of the Kui culture, which sent conflicting messages. Some remained blind to people's real needs and aspirations, and were often boxed into their denominational mould. However, these have not deterred them completely from entering into a relationship meaningful to the people. When missionaries have welcomed the untouchables, the 'unclean', ate with them, taught skills to remove them from poverty, treated their sickness and counselled in Christ's name, these have been effectual Christian communication.

Personal spoken word had been a more useful and effective tool in evangelism than the written or print mode emphasised by the Mission. Spoken word through physical and regular presence enabled relationship, and sharing and personal testimony from fellow Kui touched deeper to elicit response. Although the print was less familiar and useful to the masses, books and Bible were desired and regarded



highly on their face value. The Mission's investment and trust in the value of print was disproportionate to the actual literacy and functional readership. The mission lost its educational vision and priority soon and had no higher education. However, it reaped the benefits of earlier years' efforts from the sizable number of Christian teachers making significant contribution to the church and its mission. The schools' Christian role was narrower but the effect on traditional life was far reaching, the impact of hostels was deeper. Medical mission was the last addition but its greater and immediate impact is understandable for its powerful message of healing and care.

Christian communication in the hills is a cultural battle that is still unresolved and the mission has left behind a disputed legacy. While Christianity has communicated an understanding that has pushed the tribal out of their traditional limitations and secured them an integrating and contemporarily relevant identity, at the same time it has robbed them of many of their cultural colours and contributed to a detribalisation process they were already under. However, the most important value of the Christian gospel to the Kui was that it has communicated to them the news and possibility of a shared humanity in Christ, a possibility which was denied to them before. This message of the Gospel communicated when the mission became a ministry between equals and its words found voice and life from within the community. This research has a bearing on other and wider contexts of mission to help understand the dynamics of religious and social change among the tribal people in India.

## Appendix A

### Profile of people Interviewed

| No | Surname     | Name       | Sex    | Age  | Educational           | Village    | SC | ST | Language |
|----|-------------|------------|--------|------|-----------------------|------------|----|----|----------|
| 1  | Baliarsingh | Gour       | Male   | 65   | Class 5 <sup>th</sup> | Pokari     | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 2  | Degal       | Lomo       | Male   | 72   | Class 5 <sup>th</sup> | Dadibadi   | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 3  | Degal       | Ramnath    | Male   | 63   | Class 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Simonbadi  | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 4  | Degal       | Sanuga     | Male   | 90   | ----                  | Not asked  | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 5  | Degal       | Sindhua    | Male   | 76   | Class 3 <sup>rd</sup> | Dumudi     | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 6  | Naik        | Bansidhar  | Male   | 68   | Class 5 <sup>th</sup> | Pokari     | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 7  | Naik        | Krushna C  | Male   | 73   | Class 5 <sup>th</sup> | Simonbadi  | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 8  | Naik        | Siprian    | Male   | 43   | 9 <sup>th</sup> C.Th  | Simonbadi  | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 9  | Pradhan     | Tumuda     | Male   | 68   | ----                  | Rutungia   |    | ST | Kui      |
| 10 | Naik        | Anam C     | Male   | 85   | Class 8 <sup>th</sup> | Kanbagiri  | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 11 | Sukhamajhi  | Sambhra    | Male   | 50   | Class 5 <sup>th</sup> | Usurma     |    | ST | Kui/Ori  |
| 12 | Mallick     | Nanda      | Male   | 60   | Class 5 <sup>th</sup> | Dokebadi   |    | ST | Kui/Ori  |
| 13 | Pradhan     | Babu       | Male   | 58   | ----                  | Saringripa |    | ST | Kui      |
| 14 | Muthamajhi  | Dukhisyam  | Male   | 35   | ----                  | Borikia    |    | ST | Kui/Ori  |
| 15 | Sukhamajhi  | Lujan      | Male   | 55   | ----                  | Lanjami    |    | ST | Kui/Ori  |
| 16 | Pradhan     | Rajendra   | Male   | 50   | ----                  | Mahaguda   |    | ST | Kui/Ori  |
| 17 | Pradhan     | Narsu      | Male   | 65   | ----                  | Katrikia   |    | ST | Kui/Ori  |
| 18 | Pradhan     | Risa       | Male   | 60   | ----                  | Gorlaguda  |    | ST | Kui/Ori  |
| 19 | Pradhan     | Surama     | Female | 71   | Nursing               | Raikia     |    | ST | Kui/Ori  |
| 20 | Patamajhi   | Sibana     | Male   | 60   | ----                  | Pakeri     |    | ST | Kui/Ori  |
| 21 | Sunamajhi   | Nata       | Male   | 50   | ----                  | Gajinaju   |    | ST | Kui/Ori  |
| 22 | Sunamajhi   | Nilosha    | Male   | ---- | ----                  | Maliguda   |    | ST | Kui/Ori  |
| 23 | Mundamajhi  | Emeswar    | Male   | ---- | ----                  | Jakeshi    |    | ST | Kui/Ori  |
| 24 | Pradhan     | Darbi      | Male   | ---- | ----                  | Katrikia   |    | ST | Kui?Ori  |
| 25 | Degal       | Prafulla C | Male   | 35   | 10 <sup>th</sup>      | Katrikia   | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 26 | Paraseth    | Madhusudan | Male   | 55   | Matric                | Malipada   | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 27 | Degal       | Lesa       | Male   | 60   | 5 <sup>th</sup>       | Tum'band   | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 28 | Degal       | Raita      | Male   | 70   | ----                  | Terabadi   | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 29 | Degal       | Magistrate | Male   | 30   | 3 <sup>rd</sup>       | Baliguda   | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 30 | Naik        | Budhi      | Male   | 60   | 4 <sup>th</sup>       | Tum'band   | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 31 | Naik        | Tohomi     | Male   | 65   | 2 <sup>nd</sup>       | Dolabadi   | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 32 | Rev Naik    | Sanatan    | Male   | 60   | 10 <sup>th</sup>      | Gudripodi  | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 33 | Paraseth    | Krushna    | Male   | 55   | 5 <sup>th</sup>       | Malipada   | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 34 | Naik        | Balamati   | Female | 71   | 3 <sup>rd</sup>       | Baliguda   | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 35 | Naik        | Rama       | Male   | 40   | 7 <sup>th</sup>       | Simonbadi  | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 36 | Sunamajhi   | Bise       | Male   | ---- | ----                  | Not asked  |    | ST | Kui/Ori  |
| 37 | Baliarsingh | Nira       | Male   | 45   | 5 <sup>th</sup>       | Bandiguda  | SC |    | Kui/Ori  |
| 38 | Pradhan     | Jakashya   | Male   | ---- | Primary               | Sapeli     |    | ST | Kui/Ori  |

|    |                     |        |    |          |           |    |    |         |
|----|---------------------|--------|----|----------|-----------|----|----|---------|
| 39 | Bastarai Bachhia    | Male   | 65 | ----     | Bandiguda | SC |    | Kui/Ori |
| 40 | Rev Naik Sunampatro | Male   | 70 | Graduate | Bilupanga | SC |    | Kui/Ori |
| 41 | Rev Naik Bhagyabati | Female | 45 | BD       | Gudripodi | SC |    | Kui/Ori |
| 42 | Pradhan Paul        | Male   | 83 | Matric   | Mrk'podi  |    | ST | Kui/Ori |
| 43 | Naik Ranasing       | Male   | 70 | Nursing  | K' kuppa  | SC |    | Kui/Ori |
| 44 | Pradhan Klesha      | Male   | 43 | High Sch | Ritungia  |    | ST | Kui/Ori |
| 45 | Pradhan Sripati     | Male   | 68 | Nil      | Guluda    |    | ST | Kui     |
| 46 | Pradhan Gagan Singh | Male   | 65 | Nil      | Guluda    |    | ST | Kui     |

SC     Scheduled Caste  
 ST     Scheduled Tribe  
 C Th   Certificate in Theology  
 BD     Bachelor of Divinity  
 Ori     Oriya  
 ----   Not sure or Nil

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